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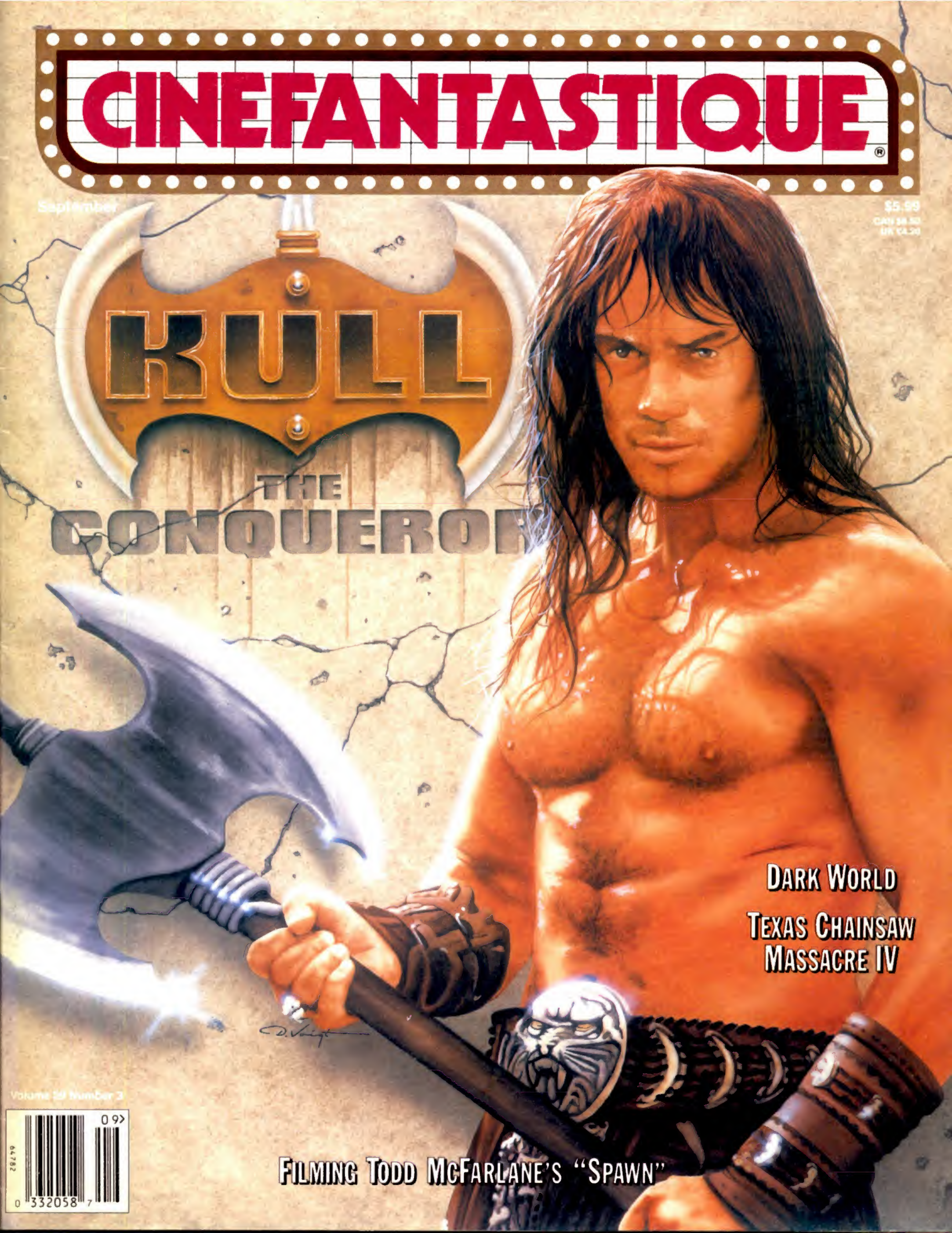
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KULL THE CONQUEROR

DARK WORLD
TEXAS CHAINSAW
MASSACRE IV

FILMING TODD MCFARLANE'S "SPAWN"

Volume 29 Number 3



CINEFANTASTIQUE

X-FILES



THE REVIEW OF HORROR FANTASY & SCIENCE FICTION, YOUR GENRE NEWS MONTHLY

CINEFANTASTIQUE is published each and every month, with issues jam-packed with the latest stories on the hottest films you want to see.

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"The Magazine with a Sense of Wonder"

SEPTEMBER 1997

Something old, something new, in this month's cover story on the making of Robert E. Howard's **KULL THE CONQUEROR** and Todd McFarlane's **SPAWN**, the Sword & Sorcery epic starring **HERCULES'** Kevin Sorbo hopes to pick up the Howard film franchise where Arnold Schwarzenegger left off, and McFarlane's comic book adaptation hopes to show what a filmed caped crusader is really capable of. You get to be the judge.

London correspondent Alan Jones was on the set of **KULL** in Bratislava, Slovakia to file his report on how producer Rafaella DeLaurentiis has picked up reigns on the Sword & Sorcery genre from her father, Dino, who produced two **CONAN** films with Schwarzenegger. Jones interviewed director John Nicollela (**MIAMI VICE**)—whose filmic vision seems based more on the comics inspired by Howard than Howard himself—as well as DeLaurentiis and Sorbo. Also profiled is the film's makeup master, Gianetto De Rossi, who provides **KULL** with effects magic the old-fashioned way. In an interesting move, after producing **DRAGONHEART**, DeLaurentiis has chosen a low-tech approach to **KULL**.

McFarlane's **SPAWN** goes in the opposite direction. The comic book auteur purposely sought out ILM hotshots Mark Dippé, Clint Goldman and Steven "Spaz" Williams to direct, produce, and supervise the effects for his comic book brainchild and make it look like no comic book film ever before. L.A. correspondent James Van Hise interviews McFarlane and his ILM brain trust in his report from the set, and also looks at the striking makeup work of the KNB Efx Group. Running counter to the rule, McFarlane's **SPAWN** features a strong cast, but not a roster of overpaid "star names." **SPAWN** is the star. Van Hise talks to Michael Jai White and John Leguizamo about performing under pounds of latex as Spawn and his nemesis Clown, and profiles Melinda Clarke as Priest, the film's femme fatale assassin.

Frederick S. Clarke



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RISING DELAYED

DEEP RISING (Hollywood)

This maritime action-adventure horror flick has been put off from October till February. Treat Williams and Famke Janssen star for writer-director Stephen Sommers (*THE JUNGLE BOOK*) in this tale of sea creatures that rise from the depths to attack a luxury cruise ship. The creatures were designed by Rob Bottin (*LEGEND*) and executed with CGI by ILM and DreamQuest. "We hide it for the first forty minutes, but lots is happening; we're keeping people on the edge of their seats and getting them prepared for when we show it. And once you show it, you go balls out. If you try to hide it these days, audiences are going to roll their eyes and say you couldn't afford it." Sommers promises one wild ride for audiences: "In this movie, almost every scene has one or more gag going on: mechanical effect, CG effect, stunt," he said. "The pace is pretty much non-stop. The first twenty minutes have a pretty good pace, and then it just takes off, and never stops." Pictured, Janssen and Williams.

Douglas Eby

February



STEEL (Warners)

August 15

As part of Hollywood's Summer Release Schedule Follies, this film saw its initial release date of August 8 pushed back a week, after New Line Cinema's rival black comic book character, *SPAWN*, was moved up to open on the same weekend. (Whether the two films would have actually been competing for the same audience is another matter; for despite their superficial similarities, they are profoundly different films: *SPAWN* is a dark gothic tale of an anti-hero from Hell, whereas *STEEL* is a squeaky clean, PG-13 superhero for the whole family.) Producer Joel Simon predicts that anyone who questions Shaquille O'Neal's acting talents will be surprised by this film. "I think his performance is beyond the expectation of what he has done previously," said Simon. "Kenny has gotten an incredible performance from Shaq. We are all very, very pleased. I think everybody who sees it will say he has grown." SEE *CFQ* 29:2

THE TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSACRE IV (CFP)

August 29

This film (previewed in *CFQ* 27:3, under the title *RETURN OF THE TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSACRE*) seemed doomed to video oblivion. Completed over a year ago, it sat on the shelf, unable to find a distributor, until a strange thing happened—well, two strange things: the film's male lead, Matthew McConaughey, starred in *A TIME TO KILL*, which earned over \$100 million at the boxoffice, and the female lead, Renee Zellweger, co-starred with Tom Cruise in *JERRY MAGUIRE*, which also made over \$100 million. Suddenly the new *CHAINSAW* film wasn't such a risk anymore, and with McConaughey's latest Hollywood extravaganza, *CONTACT* in theatres this July, August seemed a good time to cash-in on the star's fame. Kim Henkel, who co-wrote the original *CHAINSAW MASSACRE* with Tobe Hooper, wrote and directed this third sequel. Above: McConaughey and Zellweger. SEE PAGE 56.



RELEASE SCHEDULE

Upcoming cinefantastique at a glance, along with a word or two for the discriminating viewer.

compiled by Jay Stevenson
(unless otherwise noted)



DARK EMPIRE (New Line) October 17

Originally titled *DARK CITY*, then *DARK WORLD*, this futuristic film noir was pushed back from an August 29 release. The film was produced by Andrew Mason and directed by Alex Proyas (both having fulfilled those duties on *THE CROW*). The script, by Proyas and David Goyer (who wrote *THE CROW: CITY OF ANGELS*), features murder and mind control, as a man (Rufus Sewell) awakens to find that his memories are gone and that he is wanted for a string of brutal murders. William Hurt plays the detective, and Richard O'Brien (Riff-Raff in *THE ROCKY HORROR PICTURE SHOW*) plays Mr. Hand, the leader of a sinister group called The Strangers, whose powers and purpose are cloaked in mystery. Jennifer Connelly and Kiefer Sutherland round out the cast. Production design of the film is by Patrick Tatopoulos (*INDEPENDENCE DAY*, and the upcoming *GODZILLA*). SEE PAGE 7. Chuck Wagner

KULL THE CONQUEROR (Universal) August 29

Robert E. Howard's pulp fiction hero comes to the big screen in this \$35 million effort from producer Raffaella De Laurentiis. Kevin Sorbo (TV's *HERCULES*) plays the title character, who must defend his crown from the villainous Taligaro and the resurrected evil goddess Akiyasha. *MIAMI VICE*-director John Nicolella made his feature debut, working from a script by Charles Edward Pogue (*DRAGONHEART*). Tia Carrere (*TRUE LIES*) co-stars. SEE PAGE 10.

MIMIC (Dimension) August 22

In the showdown with the major studios this summer, Miramax's genre label blinked, pushing back Guillermo Del Tor's science-fiction effort from a July 18 release. Mira Sorvino stars. SEE *CFQ* 29:2

SNOW WHITE: A TALE OF TERROR (Showtime) August 22

The British just can't get it together when it comes to making genre films that will sell tickets. After *MARY SHELLY'S FRANKENSTEIN* and *MARY REILLY* became boxoffice disappointments, theatrical distribution of Polygram Pictures' *LOCH NESS* was abandoned in favor of a TV debut. Now a similar fate has befallen this \$30 million effort (filmed as *SNOW WHITE AND THE BLACK FOREST*), which was intended to be an adult version of the familiar fairy tale that put the "grim back into the Grimm original," according to director Michael Cohn (*CFQ* 28:4/5:6). Instead, the filmmakers got cold feet, cut out the horror, and wound up with a bland retelling that will bypass theatres and debut on Showtime. SEE PAGE 24.



BE CAREFUL WHAT YOU WISH FOR

WISH MASTER (Live Entertainment)

Coming in the Fall of 1997 is a film about an evil genie (or Djinn, to use the non-Western version of the word), which Live Entertainment hopes can be built into the kind of franchise that the *NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET* films became. Produced by Wes Craven, the film was written by Peter Aitkins (who scripted the *HELLRAISER* sequels) and directed by effects expert Robert Kurtzman (who made his directorial debut with *THE DEMOLITIONIST* last year). Aitkins was excited about the opportunity to create an articulate supernatural antagonist, along the lines of Clive Barker's Pinhead. "In the old writings, the Djinn were terrifying, demonic creatures," said the screenwriter. "But what really got me excited was the notion of the wish that damages the wisher. I realized I could have a lot of fun, and it was an opportunity to write an articulate monster, which I always enjoyed about writing the *HELLRAISER* series. The Djinn could be this terrifying, demonic creature in appearance, but also, by dint of necessity, be a silver-tongued devil. You have to manipulate people into asking for a wish that could be granted in a certain way to serve his ends rather than theirs." Pictured, Andrew Duoff as the Djinn.

James Van Hise

October 3

HOLLYWOOD GOTHIC

NEMO RETURNS—AGAIN!

French director preps \$45 million prequel to Jules Verne's classic.

by Alan Jones

Hot from the international box office success of *CRYING FREEMAN* (a martial arts fantasy still unreleased in the U.S.), French director Christophe Gans is set to helm a \$45 million prequel to Jules Verne's *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*. The former editor of the French cinema magazine *Starfix* came through with flying colors on that John Woo-styled 007 superhero fantasy, which got him the *20,000 LEAGUES* assignment, as he explained: "It's not a project I initiated. The Kushner Locke company, which works with August Entertainment—the people selling the distribution rights to *CRYING FREEMAN*—saw the rushes and asked me to consider tackling the idea. Everyone else they contacted thought it would cost a lot more than the \$45 million they were prepared to spend. I had really pared the \$8 million *CRYING FREEMAN* budget to the bone, and they were very impressed with the spectacular results. Everyone thought it cost at least double that."

He continued, "What Frenchman wouldn't want to make the Verne story? It was the first book I ever read at six years old. But I had reservations about taking on the memory of the 1954 Disney classic. Also there have been those two recent, and awful, miniseries. So I talked the Kushner Locke people into letting me write a prequel, although I knew what they were thinking when they agreed: the Captain Nemo character would be twenty years younger than James Mason in the Disney adaptation, giving them the opportunity to cast someone along the lines of Brad Pitt."

However, Kushner Locke were rather taken aback by Gans' treatment. "What I'd done was investigate how and why Nemo turned into a terrorist and took to the seas in the *Nautilus* submarine. The story



Christophe Gans (l) preps his \$45 million sequel to *20,000 LEAGUES UNDER THE SEA*, filmed best by Disney in 1954.

starts in the Civil War and also takes on board the black versus white racial issue. That plus the terrorism angle were the modern hooks for a contemporary audience unfamiliar with the Verne story. The plot dynamic pitted Nemo, a Deep South Fascist aristocrat, against Jacquard, a 17-year-old anti-white black slave cabin boy. Anyway, when Kushner Locke read it they accused me of being a Communist because they wanted a politically correct movie. So my *CRYING FREEMAN* producer Samuel Hadida (the man who discovered Quentin Tarantino and his *TRUE ROMANCE* script) took control of the project himself, and now we're shooting in North Carolina and the Bahamas this September. I'm using the ideology of the Nemo character to inform the action narrative in the same way Sergio Leone did in *A FISTFUL OF DYNAMITE*. But again, like in *CRYING FREEMAN*, I want to tell the story through the eyes of the woman who falls in love with Nemo. I'm of the old school who believes all fantasy should emanate from the romance, like in the best Italian movies by Mario Bava. The true title of my prequel should be 'The Woman Who Loved Captain Nemo.'"

There's another fantasy script

Gans has ready to go too. "It's an adaptation of the '70s 'Heavy Metal' Italian comic strip *RANXEROX*, which recounts the adventures of a muscle-bound punk cyborg. Unfortunately it also encompasses drug-taking, pornography, and pedophilia as the main character is a 12-year-old girl who's screwing the title robot. It's a problematic script because of the Puritan atmosphere prevalent today. Studios are scared of it even though Tony Scott, Marco Brambilla, and Uli Edel have shown interest in directing. I fear it won't ever get before the cameras unless I commit to directing it, which I'm not sure I want to do." □

RAISING HELL FOR PETA

by Steve Biodrowski

Practitioners of horror fiction and cinema are often the most non-violent people in real life. As if to underscore the point, horror author and filmmaker Clive Barker, himself no stranger to graphic descriptions of death and disembowelment, recently wrote a letter on behalf of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, asking the editors of 100 U.S. newspapers to reposition columns on hunting and fishing. The text of the letter runs as follows:

People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) and I are asking you and editors nationwide to put your hunting and fishing columns where they belong: on the obituary pages.

For decades, "outdoors" writers with snuff-it-and-stuff-it mentalities have been imposing their true-life horror stories about bagging bucks and snagging trout on newspaper readers.

Considering that the majority of Americans today prefer outdoor sports like tennis, biking, and jogging, editors should have long ago banished columnists who write about killing wildlife to the Stone Age scrap heap.

Please, at least put these accounts of animal victims' untimely demises in the proper place—with other death notices.

While acknowledging the somewhat exaggerated hyperbole of Barker's rhetoric, I would like to take the opportunity, on a personal level, to say, "Right on, Clive!" □

Short Notes

Our shock at the announcement of Fox Mulder's "suicide" in the season finale of *THE X-FILES* would have been considerably more profound, had we not known that star **David Duchovny** is already signed to do another season *and* the feature film. ☺ **Robert Duvall**, **Morgan Freeman**, and **Vanessa Redgrave** have joined the cast of the asteroid pic *DEEP IMPACT*, a joint effort between Paramount and DreamWorks. Produced by David Brown, Richard Zanuck, and Steven Spielberg, the film was scripted by Bruce Joel Rubin. The casting keeps the film ahead of **Gale Anne Hurd**'s rival flick *ARMAGEDDON*, a Touchstone effort set to roll in August with **Bruce Willis**. Yet a third asteroid-impact movie, to be written and directed by **Peter Hyams** for producer **James Cameron**, has apparently dropped out of the race. ☺ **Natasha Henstridge**, **Michael Madsen**, and **Marge Helgenberger** have signed to reprise their roles in *SPECIES II*, for MGM, to be directed by **Peter Medak** (*THE RULING CLASS*). □

PHANTOMS

This time, Dean Koontz is in charge of new film based on his novel.

by Steven Lehti

Dean Koontz's displeasure with movies adapted from his novels (*HIDEAWAY*, *DEMON SEED*) is legendary. If the upcoming adaptation of his novel *PHANTOMS* falls short, he may have only himself to blame: Koontz serves as executive producer, and [as of this writing] will hold the sole credit for the screenplay. Miramax opens *PHANTOMS* nationwide October 24.

"From what I've seen of the previous films, he has every right to be pissed off," said co-producer Joel Soisson. "Some of them have been a little dubious. Here we're using Dean Koontz's script from Dean Koontz's novel. And, the beauty of it is, it really is his vision. It's the first movie that's ever been made of a Koontz novel where he has been an active participant in protecting the vision of the film."

NEO Motion Pictures, Inc. (which Soisson formed in partnership with Michael Leahy and W.K. Border) is producing *PHANTOMS*. Their previous credits include *THE PROPHECY* ('95) and the live-action *FIST OF THE NORTH STAR*. Dimension Pictures will release the film, which stars Peter O'Toole, Joanna Goong, and Rose McGowan (*SCREAM*). Joe Chappelle (*HALLOWEEN: CURSE OF MICHAEL MYERS*) gets his first shot directing a genre movie that is not a sequel.

Soisson first encountered



Peter O'Toole plays Timothy Flyte, a discredited Oxford paleobotanist-turned-tabloid journalist who investigates baffling mass disappearances.

Koontz's novel in the mid-1980s. "I fell in love with it, and pursued it for the next ten years. We shopped this thing around until finally it wound up at Miramax."

Principal photography took place in Colorado in the autumn of 1996. The mountain hamlet of Georgetown served as the doomed town of Snowfield, Colorado (California in the novel), where most of the action takes place. Interiors were filmed in a Denver warehouse that has also served television's *PERRY MASON* and *FATHER DOWLING MYSTERIES*.

Koontz's novel is a fictional attempt to explain various mass disappearances throughout history; among them, the Mayan cities of Palenque and Pedras Negras, the New England Roanoke Colony,

and a 3000-strong army regiment which vanished without a trace in Nanking China. In the case of those Mayan cities, Soisson said, "the populace disappeared overnight, leaving food on the tables untouched, no sign of forced exodus. There's a whole bunch of these baffling mass disappearances, and what Koontz's book and our film presuppose is that these were not random. These were strikes by a subterranean-dwelling entity that comes up to feed on a semi-regular basis."

Going and McGowan play sisters who return to the town to find every one of the inhabitants either dead or missing. Peter O'Toole is

Timothy Flyte, a discredited Oxford paleobotanist turned tabloid journalist. His theories of just such a creature ruined his academic career. When the news of Snowfield's baffling disappearance comes to light, his ideas are given new credence, and he is pulled into the action. The *PHANTOMS* title derives from the creature's mimicking the dead townfolk, haunting Going, McGowan and government officials investigating the disappearance of the Snowfield populace.

The creature's actual form won't be seen until the finale. Thomas Rainone (*LORD OF ILLUSIONS; RETURN OF THE LIVING DEAD III*), serves as special effects supervisor. Neither he nor Soisson could say what the actual creature would look like, though Koontz's novel describes a massive Lovecraftian, tentacled blob. "That will be decided in post-production," Soisson said. "You see it in various forms it wants you to see it in, but what is its original form? We're basically having every designer in town [L.A.] submitting ideas. We're getting [designs of] everything from jellyfish to gods. And the idea is probably it's going to be a combination."

"Or, if it doesn't work out, then everybody's going to look into a big bright flashing light and say, 'Wow!'"

Obituaries

by Jay Stevenson

Brian May

The 63-year-old Australian film composer (not the Brit guitarist for the rock group Queen) died of a heart attack in April. During the years, beginning in the '70s, when Australian film burst upon the international scene, he scored many high-profile projects, including Peter Weir's *GALLIPOLI*. His fine genre scores include *PATRICK*, *MAD MAX* and *THE ROAD WARRIOR*, *DR. GIGGLES*, *FREDDY'S DEAD: THE FINAL NIGHTMARE*, *STEEL DAWN*, and the *TALES FROM THE CRYPT* TV series.

Edward Mulhare

The 74-year-old Irish actor, best known to TV audiences for *THE GHOST AND MRS MUIR*, died on May 24 of lung cancer. Mulhare played the lovably irascible ghost of Captain Gregg in the '60s sit-com (a role originated by Rex Harrison in the classic feature film). Amongst a wide range of credits on stage and screen, his other genre appearances include a recurring role on *KNIGHT RIDER* opposite David Hasselhoff and guest shots on Hasselhoff's later series *BAYWATCH NIGHTS* and *THE OUTER LIMITS*. He also played the villain in the James Bondish *OUR MAN FLINT*. □

PRODUCTION STARTS



BRAM STOKER'S LEG- END OF THE MUMMY

Actually, the Stoker novel is titled *Jewel of the Seven Stars*. Lou Gossett Jr. stars for writer-director Jeffrey Obrow. This production got the jump on a rival project in development from Michael Almareyda (*NADJA*), who is also trying to film the Stoker novel.

MIGHTY JOE YOUNG

Ron Underwood (*TREMORS*) directs this remake of the classic B&W film, which earned an Oscar for fx ace Willis O'Brien (*KING KONG*). Charlize Theron (*TWO DAYS IN THE VALLEY*); and Bill Paxton (*TWISTER*) star. Rick Baker and Hoyt Yeatman provide the lovable ape.

Ripper Diary Closed?

It looks like the alleged diary of Jack the Ripper will remain unopened for the foreseeable future, at least as far as Hollywood is concerned. The controversial manuscript was supposed to provide the basis for a feature film; however, after developing the project for over two years at New Line Cinema, director William Friedkin (*THE EXORCIST*) has sued the company for fraud and breach of contract, to the tune of \$2.5 million. The suit alleges that New Line and Katja Motion Picture Corporation agreed to make the pic but later changed their minds in favor of a rival Ripper project to be helmed by Allen and Albert Hughes. Meanwhile, the companies refused to put Friedkin's project in turnaround so that he can take it elsewhere, and neglected to pay him for his final rewrite of the script. □

DARK WORLD

CROW director
**Alex Proyas' new
tour of darkness.**

By Chuck Wagner

"A little knowledge is a dangerous thing, drink deep or taste not the sacred spring."

We all want to know more. What's going on? Why are these things happening? Is everything a big conspiracy? Are we free, or are we all merely acting out a script? And if so, whose script?

These existential questions and more lie at the root of **DARK WORLD**, a noir-ish tale set in a '30s-'40s-style City That Never Was which features murder, mayhem, mind control and a malevolent presence. The film is produced by Andrew Mason and directed by Alex Proyas—both having fulfilled

those duties on the equally dark **THE CROW**—and written by Alex Proyas and David Goyer—who scripted **THE CROW: CITY OF ANGELS** (aka **THE CROW II**). The casting of Rufus Sewell and William Hurt—as a man accused of a series of murders and the detective searching for him—rounds out the gray color scheme. New Line cinema opens the film nationwide October 17.

Once again, Alex Proyas will take us on a tour of darkness. In conversation, at least, Proyas seems a sunny man from a sunny place. Born in Egypt of Greek parents, Proyas made **DARK WORLD** in Sydney, Australia, where he lives. "We built the entire film," Proyas said. "Everything you see is a

In Proyas' alternate universe the subterranean strangers control everything above ground, surreptitiously, without anyone's knowledge.



The Lair of the Strangers. Inset: Aussie Alex Proyas, about to give audiences a lethal injection in a Kafka-esque tale of mind-manipulation.



set. There was virtually no location used whatsoever. It was an idea that's been with me for a very long time. It grew over time. It's been with me so long I can't really tell you. I can't remember. There's a character in the movie who's a detective, who's sort of a classic '40s-style, hard-boiled detective. I came up with an idea of making a film with a character like that who's absolutely obsessed with the facts, on a case which doesn't add up. Nothing about it makes factual sense to him. He slowly starts to go insane through the story. He can't put the facts together because they don't add up to anything rational.

"That was the germ of the idea, and it progressed into what the film is now: a story

about an entire world that is manipulated by beings."

In the story, John Murdoch, played by Rufus Sewell, finds his memories have vanished. He slowly unravels the puzzle of who he is by discovering the brain-manipulation (or Tuning, as it's called) of **The Strangers**—from which he is somehow immune. Impervious to their manipulation, he

DARK WORLD RIFF-RAFF

ROCKY HORROR's Richard O'Brien is chilling as the ultimate suit.

By Chuck Wagner

Richard O'Brien. Say his name and most people in America will say, "Huh?" But mention Riff-Raff and everyone will smile and chant "ROCKY HORROR!" O'Brien's is that sort of creation: a piece of the popular culture (crafted from popular culture). Writer, actor, lyricist, O'Brien is all these and more.

But in *DARK WORLD*, he's Mr. Hand—a character far colder than Riff-Raff. "All men in suits are fairly frightening," O'Brien said, as he mused on the character. "I went along to meet [director Alex Proyas] and read for it. He seemed to like what I was doing."

And as for the film itself, the odd story... "If you say this is a dark fairy tale, set in its own time and its own space—that's what makes sense to me. If you try to relate it to any reality that we are familiar with, then you start to ask questions: where is this place? how does this happen? But if you say it's an analogy, a parable, then it really makes sense."

O'Brien's character is one of a group called The Strangers—secret manipulators of the citizenry. "What I do," O'Brien explained, "is set up memories, false memories, chemical memories for these humans. They think they're free, but they're actually quite Pavlovian about their daily experiences."

O'Brien was born in England during World War II, but his parents moved to New Zealand. "I returned to England in 1964, and started riding horses and making movies in 1965



Jennifer Connelly as Emma in the grip of Mr. Hard, *ROCKY HORROR SHOW's* Richard O'Brien.

and have been at it ever since. One way or another," he said.

One escape from New Zealand's banal rural existence was the local, late night cinema. O'Brien watched loads of movies...and therein lies the genesis of *THE ROCKY HORROR SHOW*, which owed much of its structure from bits culled from earlier films. "It was collected lovingly from everywhere," O'Brien recalled. "It was like going into the kitchen and saying, 'I want to bake a cake.' All the ingredients are there—from science fiction, from rock-and-roll, from that period of time."

Even the awkward narrator from *TALES OF NEW SCOTLAND YARD* would figure in the story as the Charles Gray/Inspector character. Romance comics of the '50s and Lichten-

stein art also figured in the dialogue and the look of the film. And the rest, as they say, was history.

Interestingly, O'Brien didn't really script Riff-Raff for himself. "I wanted to play Eddie," he said. "I wanted to come out of the fridge, sing a rock-and-roll song and get off. Just in case it wasn't going very well. Then I wouldn't be around too long!"

Instead, he played Riff-Raff. And he doesn't mind being linked to that character. But as to a sequel to *ROCKY...*

"I think people want me to do one," O'Brien said. "And I say, where do you pick the story line up? The next day after the house has gone up? Do we pick it up twenty years later? One of the nice things about

ROCKY is that it's a definitive little piece. It's a moral tale, a fairy tale with a beginning, middle and end. Will it turn into a soap opera if you take it further? Perhaps Oedipus would provide a theme. You could call it *REVENGE OF THE OLD QUEEN!* I sat down and did a screenplay [with that title]. And I actually did three or four songs from it, and the songs are pretty good actually!"

But it didn't happen, and O'Brien was actually relieved. "Get on with something else!" he said.

And so he did. "I'm finishing off an album now, and I'm on page 120 of a novel I'm writing. So you know, it's plenty to keep going."

In this case, the moving Mr. Hand writes, and having writ, moves on. □



William Hunt plays Bumstead, a noirish detective on the trail of a murderer, but who's pulling the strings?

now is a threat to this bizarre "world order."

It all sounds so very Kafkaesque. "I love Kafka," Proyas said. "In fact, I visited his grave in Prague, because I really like his work. A lot of people have said this is Kafkaesque, but it really isn't. There is an element to that, but it's probably closer to *THE TWILIGHT ZONE*."

But at the core of this story, rather than a sense of irony, are The Strangers and their hypodermically-injected cranial agenda. "Basically they manipulate people's lives," Proyas explained. "They are basically shadowy figures. Who knows, in [our] world maybe they exist. When we all fall asleep at night they come in and rearrange the chess pieces. They change peo-

Rufus Sewell as protagonist Murdoch hounded Dostoevsky-like for a murder he didn't commit, or did he?



“The film’s something I’ve always wanted to do,” said Alex Proyas. “Really unsettle people so they look at things strangely when they come out of the theater.”

ple’s lives. They’re toying with us. Experimenting on us. The heroes in the movie discover that. Everyone else is oblivious to it. The film is essentially a mystery. I hope you’ll be deeply disturbed, along with everyone else, when you see this movie.

“For me the film is something that I’ve always wanted to do: really unsettle people in such a way that they look at things strangely when they come out of the theater. To me, in some ways, it’s a classic horror film in that respect, because I find that the horror movies that I loved when I was a kid, were ones that stayed with you. If it was a vampire movie, you went to bed with the covers up around your neck.

Besides Kafka, Proyas was influenced by science fiction more than horror, but he retains his youthful love of genre fiction. But film—instead of fiction—is Proyas’ preferred form of expression. “I paint and I write and I draw,” Proyas explained, “but for me, film combines everything: music, writing, acting. It’s a thing that is immensely powerful if it’s done well.”

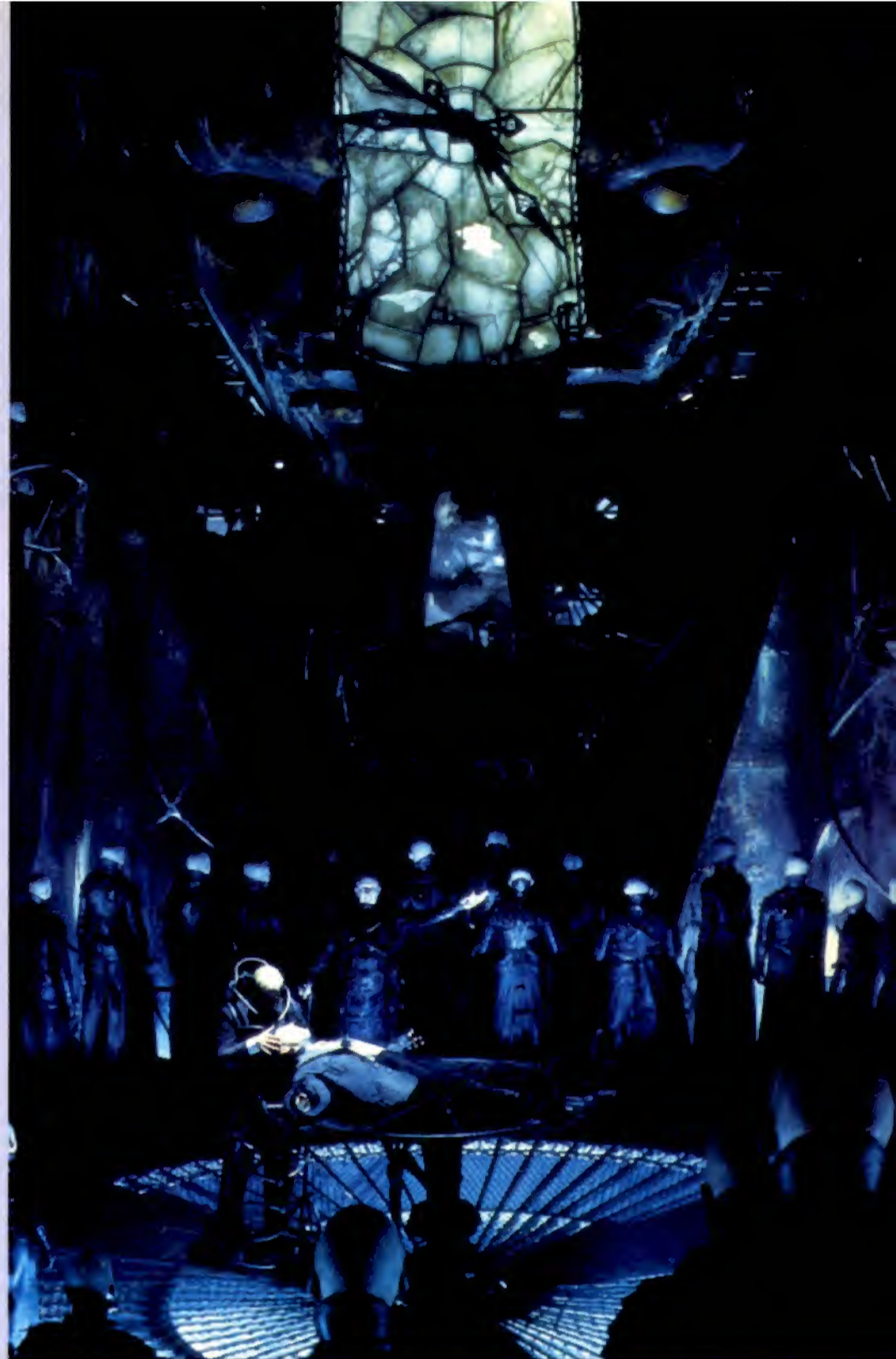
Among a stellar cast, Proyas sought a new face for his lead, a man suspected of murder and

chose stage-trained Brit Rufus Sewell. “I wanted someone fresh and exciting for this role and Rufus is all those things in plentiful supply. I think he’s going to be a very big star.”

And Richard O’Brien (Riff-Raff in *THE ROCKY HORROR SHOW*) seems to be in charge of The Strangers, making him the nemesis to Sewell’s character. O’Brien’s character, Mr. Hand (or “Under Hand,” as O’Brien himself chuckled when discussing his role) seems to be the perfect “suit.”

Noted Proyas, “I had Richard in mind physically when I wrote the character, because I had these strange, bald-looking men with an ethereal, androgynous quality. I’d seen him in *ROCKY HORROR*, but I wasn’t aware of what he was up to when I went to London to cast, but we decided, ‘Let’s meet him!’ It was like the cliché: he walked in and he was the character. He was perfect and from that point on we couldn’t imagine anyone else playing that role.”

The Strangers also have the nifty little power of being able to shut down the entire city. “It’s not so much stopping time,” Proyas said, “as it is



The Stranger’s subterranean torture chamber, Proyas’ bizarre world on stage-bound sets constructed in Sydney, production design by Patrick Tatopoulos.

putting people to sleep. Stopping people in their tracks. The face and the clock [in the Strangers’ massive lair] are their weapons for doing that.”

Other members of the *DARK WORLD* cast include William Hurt (as the detective), Jennifer Connelly (as Emma, the Murdoch/Sewell character’s estranged wife) and Kiefer Sutherland (as Doctor Schreber, an unwitting henchman of The Strangers). “William Hurt is a very demanding actor for a director,” Proyas said, “but he’s an exceptional actor. He plays a detective and Rufus Sewell is his quarry. He understood this project on a lot of different levels, in fact more levels than I had even intended! Which was great. He brought a helluva lot to the project, even beyond his own character.” Originally, Hurt

had asked to play Dr. Schreber’s character.

By the time the film opens, Jennifer Connelly will have her first child. Rumors that her involvement didn’t go well might have stemmed from early pregnancy difficulties. But Proyas denied any problems. “She told me she was pregnant on the last day of shooting,” Proyas recalled. “I wasn’t really aware of it. I appreciate her not telling me during shooting. It would’ve been one more thing for me to worry about.”

Up next for Proyas is a remake of Hammer’s *QUATERMASS & THE PIT*, being scripted by David Goyer. “I love science fiction and horror movies,” said Proyas. “I’d be very happy to just make those sorts of movies. I’m not that in love with naturalism.” □

Kiefer Sutherland as Dr. Schreber experiments on one of the Strangers. New Line Cinema opens Proyas’ dark valentine on October 17.



Kull,

Rafaella

By Alan Jones

"Of that epoch known by the Nemedian chroniclers as the Pre Cataclysmic Age, little is known except the latter part, and that is veiled in the mists of legendry. The Thurian civilization was crumbling; their armies were composed largely of barbarian mercenaries. Picts, Atlanteans, and Lemurians were their generals, their statesmen, often their kings. And the greatest of these kings was KULL THE CONQUEROR..."

Robert E. Howard

Producer Raffaella DeLaurentiis, who helped launch Arnold Schwarzenegger's film career with Robert E. Howard's *CONAN THE BARBARIAN*, now brings another one of the novelist's characters to life in *KULL THE CONQUEROR*. Her latest sword and sorcery ad-

L: Kevin Sorbo as Kull. B: Publisher Don Grant collected all of Robert E. Howard's Kull stories in an illustrated edition, with art by Ned Dameron.



the Conqueror

DeLaurentiis films tale of Conan's father.

venture marks the feature film debut of Kevin Sorbo, the star of the hugely popular syndicated television series HERCULES: THE LEGENDARY JOURNEYS.

However, despite KULL THE CONQUEROR being in a similar genre, there are fundamental differences. Sorbo, as the Atlantis outcast destined to father Conan, trades his Hercules affability and mythical demigod surfer look for a darker, meaner and moodier personality altogether. He also swaps ancient Greece for the even older kingdom of Valusia as the barbarian warrior who becomes king of the Antediluvian world with his trademark battle cry, "By this axe I rule!"

The former slave has many enemies on the Thurian Continent and one, Taligaro, resurrects the evil goddess Akivasha to seduce the crown away from him. The thrust of KULL THE CONQUEROR, is how Kull's favorite concubine, Zareta, and her holy brother, Ascalante, help him thwart Taligaro and Akivasha's black magic in Kull's epic quest to regain his Topaz throne.

Joining Sorbo in the cast are Tia Carrere (HIGH SCHOOL HIGH), Litefoot (INDIAN IN THE CUPBOARD), Karina Lombard (LAST MAN STANDING), Harvey Fierstein (INDEPENDENCE DAY), Thomas Ian Griffith (KARATE KID III), Edward Tudor Pole, Roy Brocksmith and Pat Roach.

Every comic strip adventure has their heroes and villains and in KULL THE CONQUEROR those two extremes are represented by the characters Ascalante and Akivasha. Ascalante is the high priest of Valka who is being tortured for worshipping the Breath of Valka, an unholy flame that serves to remind the kingdom of

"It was a terrific script," said DeLaurentiis. "Arnold [Schwarzenegger] liked it so much he kept hold of it for 18 months to decide if he did indeed want to do another Conan movie."



The cast and crew of KULL THE CONQUEROR, on location in Bratislava (left to right): Harvey Fierstein, Litefoot, producer Raffaella DeLaurentiis, Tia Carrere, director John Nicolella and Kevin Sorbo.

Valusia about past ungodly times. For his first deed as king, Kull releases Ascalante from prison, because Kull also suffered persecution when he was a slave and believes individuals should be free to have faith in whoever they choose. Ascalante becomes Kull's devoted servant through this act of kindness.

Noted Litefoot, the Native American star of INDIAN IN

THE CUPBOARD, "I was drawn to the inner strength he shows in himself no matter what others might say or think. Despite all the opposition to his beliefs he still has the strength to hold onto what's dear to him. And that's his religion. I liked his adventurous side too. As a priest he's learned different forms of fighting, not to provoke violence, but simply to master the art and discipline. Ascalante

never uses his fighting skills or weapons, only his emotions. It was those aspects I really responded to in his character."

John Nicolella, probably best-known for producing the trend-setting TV show MIAMI VICE, makes his feature directorial debut with the fantasy action saga. In fact, KULL's heroic on-screen adventures almost match the complicated behind-the-scenes exploits that have delayed the movie until now.

Noted producer Raffaella DeLaurentiis, "I have a very good relationship with the Howard estate and I started developing this movie in 1989 as another sequel to CONAN THE BARBARIAN [1981]. It was written as CONAN 3 [CONAN THE DESTROYER was the first sequel made in 1984] always with the idea that we could never replace Arnold Schwarzenegger in the title role. We knew when we started the project that if Arnold wasn't going to do it, we'd switch the lead character from Conan to another Howard creation, Kull."

DeLaurentiis hired Pogue to write the screenplay after she read the script he wrote for DRAGONHEART. "It was a terrific script actually," said DeLaurentiis, "and Arnold liked it so much he kept hold of it for 18 months to decide if he did indeed want to do another CONAN movie or not. Eventually he decided it probably wasn't a good idea to play Conan again at this stage in his career, and Chuck [Pogue] then rewrote the script as a KULL project. I then spent the next few years looking for the right actor to play Kull. It needed to be someone very special or else I wouldn't make the film. At one point Jean-Claude Van Damme was involved. Then Ja-

son Scott Lee was a possibility after we made DRAGON: THE BRUCE LEE STORY together. The director of that film [and DeLaurentiis' two subsequent productions DRAGONHEART and DAYLIGHT], Rob Cohen, was penciled in to direct KULL too. But the project always seemed to be in a continuous state of flux and I was never 100% happy with any suggestion."

Then, just as she was about to leave Hollywood for Bratislava to produce DRAGONHEART, DeLaurentiis saw Kevin Sorbo's audition video tape for HERCULES. "He made an instant impression on me," said DeLaurentiis. "When we finished DRAGONHEART in the Spring of 1995, I immediately did a screen test with Kevin the moment I got back to Los Angeles. That's when I knew I had the right actor for KULL. Then I had to leave for Rome to make DAYLIGHT and rising star Kevin was up to his neck in HERCULES schedules. We both had to wait a year to finally get KULL THE CONQUEROR rolling, but it was worth all the delays."

Noted DeLaurentiis, "I was terrified of simply replacing Arnold Schwarzenegger with a pale imitation. That's exactly the mistake that could have been made. Arnold is Arnold. There's no one else like him."

In 1981 Arnold Schwarzenegger sprung to fame in CONAN THE BARBARIAN, produced by Dino DeLaurentiis.



Kull

KEVIN SORBO

HERCULES' hard-working hero on making the leap to the big screen.

By Alan Jones

"Getting your own television show is like being struck by lightning. If it's a smash hit, it's like being struck twice," is how 37 year-old Kevin Sorbo describes his good fortune as the star of the top syndicated series HERCULES: THE LEGENDARY JOURNEYS. But like most overnight success stories, Sorbo's has taken years to happen. Fifteen in fact. Prior to landing the role of the mythical demigod, the six-foot three-inch native of Mound, Minnesota, was one of the most successful commercial actors in the business, advertising everything from Budweiser, BMW and Lexus, to Diet Coke and Jim Beam whiskey. However, throughout these assignments, Sorbo never lost sight of his dream to become a dramatic actor, appearing in the TV shows CRITICAL CONDITION, ASPEN and CYBILL.

It was Sorbo's natural athleticism, martial arts prowess and ability to perform his own stunts that won him the Hercules role. "I work out for 90 minutes each and every day and have the sort of physique that if you apply yourself you could potentially achieve," he said on the KULL set in Bratislava, Slovakia. "That's one of the keys to the success of HERCULES in my opinion. I'm not like all the other actors who've played him—Steve Reeves, Lou Ferrigno, Arnold Schwarzenegger. I'm not a body-builder. I'm simply fit and athletic and quite ordinary, an av-



Sorbo as Kull, rides with Taligaro (Thomas Ian Griffith) the ungrateful commander of Valusia's exclusive Dragon Legion.

erage man everybody can identify with."

Other factors that have made the Robert Tapert/Sam Raimi produced show so popular include the spectacular Hong Kong style action, the fun monster visual effects and the tongue-in-cheek humor with a decidedly contemporary spin. Sorbo remarked, "I refuse to take myself seriously in the show and always have self-deprecating one-liners ready for use when a scene begs for it. The whole cast send themselves up and that humor is what makes it so charming to watch. Everything is done with a wink. You never see any blood and the violence is done in a stylized cartoon way. HERCULES is story-book television. It's a complete package of colorful action,

moral messages, good clean fun, and a cast who keep the balance exactly right."

Naturally, the success of HERCULES means Sorbo has been flooded with movie offers. But he decided to go with KULL THE CONQUEROR for one main reason. "It was the only script I was offered that had a really good story full of character and emotion," said Sorbo. "I was offered a futuristic movie and one set in the present day also, but neither grabbed me when I read the scripts. True, KULL is sort of set in the same HERCULES Sword and Sorcery time period with the same kind of fantasy stuff going on. At first I wasn't sure about that. However, the chance to work with such

an industry luminary as Raffaella DeLaurentiis swayed my decision. She really believed I could do it, too and our personalities clicked instantly. I was comfortable about the way she viewed the movie as a vehicle for me and how she took on board my concerns. I didn't want Kull to be a Hercules clone."

Noted Sorbo, "Kull's a barbarian and most of the comic relief comes from the other cast members. Here's a guy who was abandoned as a six year old by his father and grew up in the woods and learned how to be a predator from the forest animals. He's from the wrong side of the tracks but he fought against that and worked his way up the ranks to become king of his empire. But he misuses that



Sorbo as Robert E. Howard's Kull, who became king of his antediluvian world and rules with the sweep of his axe, sailing on a quest of self-discovery.

KEVIN SORBO ON "WORKING"

“Marlon Brando always said that actors were the most immature people in the world and I agree with him. I hope I never grow up and can always play like this forever.”

Being in Bratislava hasn't bothered Sorbo as much as he initially thought it would either. He said, "It's the same as being in New Zealand except they speak a different language. Actually we have about five languages being spoken on this multi-national crew. I spent three years touring over Western Europe a while back but I'd never been inside the old Eastern block before. It's weird because you have preconceptions about these places from old Cold War/spy movies. Nothing about the filmmaking process is different though. It's still 'the hurry up and wait' syndrome. I wish I had more time to sightsee as it's a beautiful country but I've been working such long hours and my 1996/97 HERCULES schedule means I have to wrap KULL up by October 25, 1996, to go back to New Zealand."

In many ways, KULL THE CONQUEROR is being made as a direct response to HERCULES because the TV show has made Sword and Sorcery commercially viable again. Sorbo remarked, "The entertainment business is a sheep business that's for sure. But if HERCULES is responsible then I take that as a compliment. At the

moment HERCULES is a tough act to beat, but if we do get beat by the wealth of competition out there like SINBAD, TARZAN, even the CONAN series, then so be it. That's why I had to make sure my career progressed into the key area of film. I'll play Hercules as long as they want me to. I do love him as a character, and I'm still having fun with him. But I have to do something that will keep my own ambitious fire alive and movies like KULL mean that to me."

With HERCULES continuing into the next century a likely probability, and KULL THE CONQUEROR also offering the same franchise possibilities, it seems Kevin Sorbo couldn't be in a better career position. He smiled, "It's a dream come true. I haven't been able to enjoy it because I've been working so hard and can't see any window in the future to do so either. It's hard to take stock of the fact that this is all part of the dream I've been wishing for ever since I was 11 years old. I'm being paid for this!?! Give me a break! Marlon Brando always said actors were the most immature people in the world and I agree with him. I hope I never grow up and can always play like this forever." □

Sorbo as Kull poised for battle, with his trademark axe. In contrast with his well-known television role, Sorbo describes Kull as "the dark flip side of Hercules."

power and through stupidity loses it very quickly. Yet he can take care of himself and is perhaps the dark flipside of Hercules. Kull is still an enjoyable hero though. He learns that, in order to win, he must follow his heart."

Sorbo would have insisted on it if it hadn't been the case, but Kull's look is totally different from Hercules in terms of costumes, hair and even eye makeup. "That was important for me as I don't want the two to be blurred in people's minds," said Sorbo. "I did start this movie thinking in terms of how I could stay on top of that differentiation, but I don't think about it any more. It's not a case of, well Hercules would do this, so Kull should do that. Perhaps I mentally prepared myself for the differences even before I arrived in Bratislava. When I'm dressed as Kull I don't even think of Hercules. Kull has a facial scar in the comics but we decided against that as the make-up they were going to use might have left me with permanently damaged skin. Kull also means a whole new acting technique as I have more pages of

dialogue in one 45 minute HERCULES episode than I do in this entire movie!"

Another way Sorbo prepared himself for KULL was to spend seven weeks prior to the start date learning how to manipulate his trademark battle axe and become familiar with the stuntwork he would have to do. That meant use of all of his free time from filming HERCULES on location in Auckland, New Zealand. Sorbo is contracted to be HERCULES until 1999 and, because ten months of every year is devoted to filming episodes with an eight day turnaround, Sorbo lives in New Zealand on a permanent basis.

"It's a punishing schedule," said Sorbo. "For the first year I also worked 14 hour days, six days a week. When you have to work out and learn eight pages of dialogue a night, that's a brutal regime. Then I had to put KULL practice into my schedule so I'd be ready for the film in my two month hiatus from the series. It was important for me to make the audience believe that when Kull swings his axe, he could actually do some serious damage with it."



Kevin has such different qualities of fun, warmth and strength totally unique to him. I really think Kevin will be a major motion picture star of the future. If you tackle this type of Sword and Sorcery material 16 years after CONAN THE BARBARIAN, you've got to bring a different point of view to it. You can't just do it the same way and hope for the best. Things have changed. The industry has changed. Even if Arnold had decided he'd wanted to make it as CONAN 3, we would have made enormous changes. Casting Kevin was so important to KULL THE CONQUEROR and I mean it when I say if we hadn't found him, we wouldn't be making the film."

But having to wait for Sorbo's hiatus from the hugely popular HERCULES to start filming KULL meant Kevin Hooks, the former actor turned director with PASSENGER 57 and FLED to his credit, had to bow out of the project. DeLaurentiis didn't have to look too far for a replacement. "I'd worked with John Nicolella before and we

DIRECTOR JOHN NICOLELLA

"When you're a kid growing up in Brooklyn, being able to escape to a fantasy world of witches, ice caverns, galleons and ogres meant a hell of a lot...I'm glad to be making KULL."



Above: Schwarzenegger in CONAN THE DESTROYER. Left: KULL producer Raffaella DeLaurentiis and Wilt Chamberlain filming CONAN THE DESTROYER.

liking yet, thinking about it, I always did love the Sword and Sorcery genre. When you're a kid growing up in Brooklyn, being able to escape to a fantasy world of witches, ice caverns, galleons and ogres meant a hell of a lot. For all those reasons I'm glad to be making KULL.

"What excites me most is the idea of being able to go to areas where people haven't been—to create your own images and visions of what it would be like. When you direct MIAMI VICE, audiences expect certain things. But when you make a fantasy movie, they don't know what to expect, and you can give them what you want without conforming to any rules. It's sure is a lot of fun taking people into a different world with a different look and a different vision. I'd like to redefine the fantasy movie as I did the cop show with MIAMI VICE. Every genre needs a shake-up now and then. It's time to give Sword and Sorcery a fresh look."

In a strange coincidence it was Nicolella who had actually shot Kevin Sorbo's KULL screen test for Raffaella DeLaurentiis 18 months before landing the actual directing job himself. "I had also shot Thomas Ian Griffith's test, too," said Nicolella. "We had worked together on the TV movie THE ROCK HUDSON STORY. Kevin is perhaps the most directable actor I've ever worked with. He wants to make KULL work. He's very open to all my suggestions. He listens and he'll try everything even though he clearly doesn't agree with me sometimes. CONAN put a huge rocket under Arnold Schwarzenegger's career and I expect KULL to do the same for Kevin.

"Kevin is a pleasure to look at and his charisma makes every scene interesting," continued Nicolella. "It has been my job to keep him in the acting moment. My assignment with all the actors has been to ensure they're not outside their characters looking in. That's a mistake you can often make with this genre. The whole set-up might be ridiculous but the actors have to sincerely believe in every word. KULL THE CONQUEROR is not intended to be a big serious epic: Kevin's



developed a good relationship together," said DeLaurentiis. "He'd directed the eight-hour mini-series VANISHING SON for me and I had been extremely impressed with him. He had been technically well-prepared, good with the actors and great with the action. It had taken so long to get Kevin Sorbo that I wanted someone I could trust to direct and nurture him in the

way I wanted. That person was John Nicolella."

While Nicolella is famous for shaking up television with MIAMI VICE, and other episodic series like THE UNTOUCHABLES, MELROSE PLACE, CRIME STORY and NASH BRIDGES, the Brooklyn born Italian actually started his career in film producing INTERIORS for Woody Allen,

SATURDAY NIGHT FEVER for John Badham and LAST EMBRACE for Jonathan Demme amongst numerous others. Noted Nicolella, "In a perfect world, KULL THE CONQUEROR would probably have not been my first choice as a film directing vehicle but, hey, that's life. You take what comes along. Perhaps an action comedy would have been more to my

Kull

TIA CARRERE

Playing evil and nasty—and loving it.

By Alan Jones

Akivasha, the evil Queen of Darkness, is played by the ravishing Hawaiian beauty Tia Carrere, star of *WAYNE'S WORLD*, *TRUE LIES*, *RISING SUN* and *HIGH SCHOOL HIGH*. Asleep for 3000 years, Akivasha is resurrected by Taligaro to snatch the Valusian throne from a bewitched Kull. "Taligaro is trying to steal Kull's power and is using me as a tool," said Carrere. "But little does he know that his power over me is absolutely useless. *KULL* is exactly the type of film I adore taking my little nephew to see. I love *Sword and Sorcery* to death. Anything medieval like *THE NAME OF THE ROSE* or *LADYHAWKE*, which I thought was wonderful, and I'm first in line."

However, Akivasha was not the role Carrere originally met director John Nicolella to dis-

cuss. "They wanted me to play Zareta, Kull's fortune-telling concubine," said Carrere. "But when I read the script I was more drawn to Akivasha. I enjoy playing those types of arch, bizarre roles. Any actor, if they were honest, would say playing the dark side is much better fun. I begged and pleaded to play Akivasha and finally they caved in. Akivasha is a role I'm really relishing. I want audiences to wish they could be as evil and nasty themselves!" The role of Zareta was taken by Karina Lombard.

Noted Carrere, about her director, "John Nicolella is a big bulldozer actually. He sort of has this ability to run right over you. All you can do is pick yourself up, dust yourself off and start all over again. We have a good collaboration. We came to the table with what we both wanted Akivasha to achieve and, as our Fieldmaster General, I listened to him and



Tia Carrere as Akivasha the Evil Queen of Darkness. Carrere chose to play the film's lead villain, instead of the originally-offered role of Kull's concubine.

then fought for what I wanted. We figured it all out to our mutual satisfaction. I wanted to be wild, crazy and free with my interpretation because you shouldn't have to worry about parameters of behavior normal human beings have to follow with such an evil part. My wardrobe is fabulous too and that really helps my characterization. Sometimes all I have to do to create the best effect is speak softly."

It's Carrere who has the lion's share of the special effects work in *KULL THE CONQUEROR*. "My most involved stuff is the

flying," she said. "I've had to learn how to use a harness for flying 20 feet in the air. Practicing in casual clothes and boots is one thing. Doing it in elaborate costume is another entirely. I have to do all these flips up in the air too. Yes, it's scary. But I've gotten to know the stunt guys really well who handle the wires. They've done it all before and their extensive experience has calmed me down. I also have a lot of make-up prosthetics to wear when I go through the monster metamorphosis during an eclipse of the sun. Bits of the real hideous me emerge as it gets darker. I had a body cast made and the monster bits were molded onto that."

Tia Carrere and her leading man, Kevin Sorbo, were no strangers to each other either, as the actress explained. "We know each other from ten years ago as we used to be at the same modeling agency. It's a small world. When we saw each other again we both congratulated each other on our mutual successes. Kevin and I have both had to get over the MTA thing. That's the model-turned-actor prejudice. We've both done it pretty well. It's fantastic how *HERCULES* has made him a star. I'm very happy for him. And *KULL THE CONQUEROR* can only lead to even better things, because he's such a talented and nice person." □

Carrere and Kevin Sorbo enjoying a scenery-chewing role: "Playing the dark side is much better fun," says Carrere.



HERCULES series has proved you can add a certain camp value which enhances the entertainment factor. Kevin has a special sense of humor about him, anyway. But KULL is nowhere near as light as HERCULES, and I'm stressing the integrity of Howard's character."

Nicolella cited the scene he's just finished directing as an example of that integrity. On a large soundstage at the Sloveny Film Studio Koliba, high on a hill overlooking Bratislava's city center, the Ice Cathedral set has been built for a sequence where Kull searches for the mystical Breath of Valka, the only way to destroy Akivasha's evil reign, amongst the frozen corpses of warriors and the ever-present spirit of his father. The director pointed out, "This is a terribly important scene. Kull becomes king quite early in the show but, because he's a barbarian, it's all new to him and he's clearly not ready for prime-time kingdom. Up until now he's made huge mistakes that have cost him dearly. In fact, here it costs him Ascalante. But this is where Kull is finally put on the right track and in his speech—'I was blinded by pride and greedy dreams and now the kingdom will pay the price'—he acknowledges how much he was to blame while swearing a just vengeance. It's a

DeLaurentiis with Kevin Sorbo on location in Bratislava. The area's "fairytale" look is quite evident.



Kull

MAKEUP EFFECTS

Gianetto De Rossi brings old-world craftsmanship to the look of KULL.

By Alan Jones

Gianetto De Rossi is from a filmmaking family that has worked in makeup and hair design for the Italian cinema since 1908. Following in the footsteps of his grandfather and father, De Rossi has created make-up for such internationally renowned movies as the Elizabeth Taylor CLEOPATRA, John Huston's THE BIBLE, Franco Zeffirelli's THE TAMING OF THE SHREW and Sergio Leone's ONCE UPON A TIME IN THE WEST. In the late Seventies, gore-meister Lucio Fulci asked him to work on ZOMBIE, and about that experience, De Rossi said, "It was an important time for me. Lucio was a very strange person. Very cultured and artistic on one side, a sleazy bum on the other. ZOMBIE was made for no money, so not only could I not afford to make latex appliances, but also we never knew what extras would be available to be the living dead. I just smeared red clay on whoever's faced was in front of me. It turned out to be the perfect look for that film."

De Rossi also worked on SEVEN DOORS OF DEATH/THE BEYOND for Fulci and then joined producer Raffaella DeLaurentiis for DUNE, CONAN THE DESTROYER, TAI PAN and, more recently, DRAGONHEART and DAYLIGHT. He said, "I started in this profession hoping that one day a movie like KULL THE CONQUEROR would arrive at my door. It's everything I've al-



Zuleki, (left, played by Pat Roach) and Enaros, (Edward Tudor Pole) posing outside the makeup trailer on location in Bratislava.

ways wanted to do in one movie, despite it being an unbelievable amount of work." Unlike DRAGONHEART which relied mostly on computer graphic images, KULL goes back to the basic techniques that De Rossi likes. "Raffaella and [director] John Nicolella discussed digital effects, but then decided I could do it better," said De Rossi. "They thought I'd like to rise to the challenge and they were right."

For De Rossi and his thirteen strong group of artists, the hefty workload on KULL comprised of the following: "Two major transformations—a Mummy into the magnificent witch, Akivasha, who later changes into a monster—two humanoid creatures, Zuleki [played by Pat Roach] and a smaller version

we named Zulekino, thirteen frozen people for the Ice Cathedral, a giant fish for the galleon scene where Zareta is seasick, 60 albino pythons and facial burns for Akivasha's slave Enaros (played by Edward Tudor Pole) when she teaches him a lesson in the torture chamber."

But the biggest job for De Rossi was designing, creating and operating the six Mummies of Acheron, giant monsters which Akivasha awakens to do her bidding. Each was given a separate name; The Fat Mummy, Mosquito, Dumbo, Lady Godiva, Half and Half and Dry. De Rossi described the whole process involved in making the Mummies. "I read the

script, then met John Nicolella and tried to smell out his vision. I then tried my hardest to improve his ideas. After 20 days I sent him a photo of the first Mummy model. I made sure he knew they were gigantic and that they weren't wrapped in bandages. We've already seen that before and it's such a lazy approach to take. He was very pleased with the first photo and back came the order, 'Keep going.' So I made each Mummy unique adding details only my crew might see, for example, one has a tail point designed as the head of a snake. And there's another creature on her back too! It's fantasy irony and I love that."

All the Mummies were sculpted in latex as giant suits to be worn by stunt actors. "I hate

MAKEUP SUPERVISOR DE ROSSI

“I did every drawing myself... I wanted to prove that one little Italian artisan, with no money, could make something look perfect. I’ve done that with KULL.”



The Akivasha mummy prior to transforming into Tia Carrere as the evil queen. DeRossi's conventional makeup effects saved on CGI expense.

stop-motion animation,” said De Rossi. “I’ve never seen a film where I thought it was done perfectly. It was important to build the Mummies for real so we could do close-ups. And the closer you get, the more these look better. That’s why we spent so much time on each model. If you know exactly what you want to shoot for the best effect, there is no better way of doing it than the one we’ve chosen. A slight movement, a quick shot, an edit... just like in commercials, bang, bang, bang, and all those pieces can represent movement. The scene where Akivasha is chanting to bring the Mummies to

life is incredibly effective. On her left side she has two Mummies in shot and as she sings, suddenly they move, and an arm shoots out. It’s a beautiful fantasy image—the best of its kind.”

As for Akivasha’s transformation into a monster, De Rossi remarked, “The storyboards for this scene missed something for me. Then it struck me, we should break her chest open too. It needed a more visceral touch. I didn’t look at any of the *Kull* comics for inspiration, either. You’ll always try to copy something badly if you do that. I did every drawing myself because I wanted to open up my fantasies.

Frozen corpses in the Ice Cathedral. The icy figures were just one item on KULL’s grocery list of effects, which included 60 albino pythons, a giant fish and more.



I must also confess the truth. I wanted to prove that one little Italian artisan, without much money, could make something look perfect. I’ve done that with KULL.”

And so has director Nicoletta, noted De Rossi. “John is 50% Italian, so naturally, he’s a good director. Everyone knows all the best directors are Italian. Don’t they? I first met John when we worked together on *THE VALACHI PAPERS* [1972]. John doesn’t pretend to know everything—like so many directors do—and listens when there are problems. If something he’s asked us to do isn’t possible, then we’ll tell him, and he’s fine about solving it another way if we can assure him we won’t sacrifice the look of the shot. He doesn’t make life complicated—the curse of most American directors... and I know! I’m trying to improve his work. We are all working for the common good and if my little departmental world can help him make KULL better, then I will give him my best.”

When De Rossi met Kevin Sorbo for the first time, it was very much a case of Nicoletta saying, ‘Okay, let’s see what you can do with him?’ according to the veteran makeup man. “I didn’t expect to be confronted by such a handsome, regular guy after that introduction. I deliberately wanted to make him more human than most comic book heroes so, after some discussion, we left out his facial scar, and made him less menacing altogether. KULL is aiming for a PG-13 rating so we couldn’t make him too scary for children. I gave him a dark brown wig, which looks even darker on Kevin, and makes his blue eyes burn even brighter. Kohl makeup around the eyes accentuated that more. When I took my first glimpse at his complete look I turned to Kevin and told him, ‘You will do KULL 2. I

can predict it already.”

Besides his extensive work in makeup design, De Rossi has written and directed the horror films *TUMMY*, *KILLER CROCODILE*, and its sequel, and the Italian television fantasy *CYBORG: II GUERRIO D’ACCIAIO/CYBORG: WAR OF STEEL*. He’s currently writing a horror fairy tale to start production in Germany in 1997.

“Everyone works for two reasons only—passion and money,” said De Rossi. “I like money like everyone else but it’s outrageous what some people in my profession charge and then do. I always want to do my best for Raffaella because I’ve watched her grow up and I love her. She works even more hours than I do! She’s the most humane producer I’ve met in my professional life because she knows that if you love her, you will give her what she wants. Raffaella wants KULL THE CONQUEROR to be a Sword and Sorcery masterpiece and I will do anything to help her do that.” □

Makeup supervisor Gianetto De Rossi sets up Akivasha’s transformation into a monster.



Kull

PRODUCTION DESIGN

DESIGN

*Benjamin Fernandez
on improvising the exotic.*

By Alan Jones

Spanish-born Benjamin Fernandez first collaborated with Raffaella DeLaurentiis as art director on CONAN THE BARBARIAN and DUNE. He began his career as a draftsman on such epics as EL CID and THE FALL OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE, graduating to assistant art director on DOCTOR ZHIVAGO and ALIEN, and re-

the best possible look. Of course it's nicer to expensively create something out of nothing but with KULL we had to create something out of a reality that already existed, to keep costs down."

Noted Fernandez, "The locations in Bratislava greatly influenced the KULL look. The most important one was for Valusia and the Citadel. No matter where you were in Valusia, you had to see the Citadel with its eternally burning flame. We finally chose a hilltop castle at Spis [pronounced *Spich*] 300 kilometers from the Koliba Studio in central Slovakia and built our main Valusia square close by. While I designed the square to allow for as many different structures, and camera angles, as possible, and used Egyptian, pre-Roman and Etruscan architecture styles, I call the whole patchwork look KULL Assyrian."

Fernandez's design brief meant he had to customize existing locations into catacombs, torture dungeons and pagan temples. These were all brilliantly executed at Cerveny Kamen Castle, which doubled as the Citadel interior. (The Citadel exteriors were shot at Debin Castle where the River Danube splits in two.) On the Koliba Studio soundstages Fernandez had to build grottos, bed chambers, harems, the Ice Cathedral and the Breath of Valka flame, all from scratch.

"Actually the catacombs set was a revamp of the Dragon cave in DRAGONHEART which, incredibly, was still here when we returned!" said Fernandez. "The most complicated



Kull (Kevin Sorbo) at the throne of Akivasha (Tia Carrere). Benjamin Fernandez customized existing locations to achieve the film's exotic look on a low budget.

set was for the climax where Akivasha is floating in the flame as we had to allocate a safe aperture for the real flames to pass through while allowing for the cameraman to light it properly and the visual effects people to control the wind and fire. Koliba has no gantries so we had to build a construction that allowed the crew to work under and over the set while still accommodating floating walls."

The impressive Ice Cathedral set had to be made watertight for the moment where Kull cleaves open a wall carving with his axe in rage and unleashes a waterfall. This set then became the ship graveyard with vessels trapped in ice. Mention ships to Fernandez though and his eyes roll in despair.

"They took the longest amount of time and were the first build we worked on when we arrived in Bratislava in March, 1995," he said. "We had to film the slave galleon scenes in nearby Croatia because you can't just build a ship and put it on the Danube without getting the correct permission from the River Navigation authorities. The Danube has a heavy flow of river traffic. We had to show them all our design specifications by law, apply for this change, then that one, and pass many exams once we'd built the main ship. Then we had to drive it to Croatia without the mast as we wouldn't get it through the road tunnels otherwise! It was a nightmare. That ship was then revamped into two others for cost purposes." □

Shoestring adventure props: After constructing the slave galley and carrying it by truck to the Danube, Fernandez's crew revamped the ship into two others!



Art director Mario Trentini on one of the few scratch-built sets, a harem set at Bratislava's Koliba Studio.

cently served as fully fledged production designer on TRUE ROMANCE, before moving onto DRAGONHEART and DAYLIGHT.

Heavily influenced by the Frank Frazetta paintings for CONAN, Fernandez decided the baroque styles found in Bratislavan architecture would influence the KULL look more. "Films are not about the amount of creative freedom you have," said Fernandez. "They're about what you have to shoot to give

key turning point in the picture and I have to keep my eye on stuff like that to make sure the essential story points show up even if Kevin could be deflecting them by being exceptionally heroic."

Sorbo does 95% of his stunts in HERCULES and has done all of his stunts in KULL except for one. "We shoot an entire fight scene on HERCULES in half a day," said Sorbo. "It takes eight days for each sequence on KULL. It's far more exhausting to do it that way, too. The one stunt I didn't do was done by a stunt double wearing a mask. I was prepared to do it but everyone looked at me as if I was crazy and said, why? I think part of it is ego. I come from such an athletic background I still think I can do all the things I did when I was 21. I've been told, by people whose advice I should respect, to get a permanent action stunt double and I think it's probably time to look into that. Obviously the action route is the road I'm on—I'd love to make a romantic film—but action seems to be it for me."

But it's swings and roundabouts for Sorbo on the special effects side of KULL. He may be doing all his stunts but he has practically no involvement whatsoever in any special effects work. "There's a lot in this show but none of them involve me apart from some blue screen work," he said. "With me it's what you see is what you get. I'm not sorry either, if you want the truth. Okay, I do fight the Six Mummies of Acheron but they are physically in the frame and it's not complicated stuff. The visual effects on KULL will take nearly a year to perfect while the HERCULES guys usually have two months to get it all together. That's another reason why I find it so hard to compare the two characters as each involves a completely different set of working parameters."

Like Sorbo, director John Nicolella is making his feature film debut with KULL THE CONQUEROR and, although Sorbo was sorry to see Kevin Hooks bow out of helming the fantasy, he was delighted by the choice. "John is a real pleasure," said Sorbo. "The patience

DIRECTOR JOHN NICOLELLA

"Kids are very sophisticated these days and won't put up with a *Flash Gordon* treatment. We feed them such big, hi-tech, expensive movies these days..."



T & R: Kull (Kevin Sorbo) embraces his true love Zareta (Karina Lombard, of LAST MAN STANDING). B: Kull must save Zareta from the Valusians.



he has to muster in order to lead this parade is staggering. He's a very funny guy and that's an enormous help when everyone is so far away from home. There's a lot of joking on this production! John has the right sort of personality to be the director of KULL. I've had a lot of early ideas about how to play Kull and John has made sure I stick to them. If I've ever

veered away from my definition, he's been the first person to let me know. He wants KULL to be as successful as I do. We're both hungry for that success."

Robert E. Howard was born in Peaster, Texas, in 1906 and committed suicide in 1936 on learning of his mother's imminent death. But within that short space of time his stories became

the cornerstone of what was to develop into the Sword and Sorcery fantasy sub-genre. Seventeen Conan stories appeared in *Weird Tales*—the magazine which became his most regular market—and four were published posthumously in other pulp fiction periodicals. *King Kull* predated *Conan* in *Weird Tales* and his adventures were edited into a 1967 collection, with additional material by Lin Carter. The Marvel Comics adaptations followed in the Seventies and were instrumental in introducing *Kull the Destroyer* to a whole new market who learned, among other things, that he was Conan's ancestor and his bitterest enemy was Thulsa Doom. In Raffaella DeLaurentiis' production CONAN THE BARBARIAN, Thulsa Doom,



played by James Earl Jones, was drafted in by screenwriters John Milius and Oliver Stone to become the Cimmerian's arch enemy.

"I have all the *Kull* comics," revealed Nicolella, "But I didn't use them as vague storyboards for the movie. I read them to see what makes Kull tick, who he is and why [the character] was so successful. I always knew going in we'd have to bring him slambang up to date as the comics relate to an older style. Kids are very sophisticated these days and won't put up with a *Flash Gordon* treatment. We feed them such big, hi-tech, expensive movies these days, they

can compute it far better than any adult can."

And the lighter PG-13 market is exactly the audience demographic Nicolella is aiming for. "I have four kids—one was born here in Bratislava during shooting—and if I could make an action movie they could see then I've succeeded," said Nicolella. "I don't want to scare them half to death, or be violent and bloody. I want to make an addition to the world of fantasy entertainment. I owe it to them. As long as it has the original comic strip's substance, and we never lose it, then I'm happy."

Raffaella DeLaurentiis added, "Casting Kevin meant KULL had to be skewed younger anyway because his biggest HERCULES audience is that age. It has a more light-hearted atmosphere as a result. Fantasy is a difficult genre to pull off. You either love it or you don't. It's a very fine line you walk. Obviously, I love it—you only have to look at my past credits to see that. I didn't want anybody involved in KULL who didn't respond to what I saw in it, who didn't get it. You have to buy into the fantasy aspects and embrace them or that won't be communicated to the audience."

Hence DeLaurentiis surrounded herself with key production personnel whom she knew were adept at the fantasy format. Co-producer Hester Hargett and veteran creature and make-up designer Gianetto De Rossi had worked with De Laurentiis on numerous occasions

DeLaurentiis with DRAGONHEART director Rob Cohen, one of the first to try to bring Kull to the screen.



Kull

CHARLES EDWARD POGUE, SCREENWRITER

In the KULL story, some of the fiercest battles weren't on screen.

By James Van Hise

KULL THE CONQUEROR began its twisting road to the big screen as CONAN III written by Charles Edward Pogue. Although initially rumored to have been an adaptation of Robert E. Howard's "The Hour of the Dragon," it actually only takes small elements from that story (the resurrection of a long dead wizard of Acheron, and Conan reuniting with his old pirate cronies) and instead is completely original and doesn't directly adapt any individual Howard story.

The project began in 1991 when Chuck Pogue suggested that Universal finally produce CONAN III. "I had just finished [writing] DRAGONHEART for Raffaella [DeLaurentiis] and suddenly the sun rose and shone on my butt," Pogue recalled. "I could do no wrong at the studio and Raffaella thought I was a genius. I said that what I've always wanted to do is Conan, because, begging your pardon, but I don't think that anybody's quite got it right yet. Within two weeks the deal was done. It was the fastest deal. They really wanted me to write it."

The plan from the start was that if Universal couldn't get Arnold Schwarzenegger to reprise the roll of Conan, it would be turned into a Kull movie, which is ultimately what happened, after waiting a year for Schwarzenegger to pass on the idea. Noted Pogue, "My edict was always that I wanted to do a thinking man's swash-buckler, something along the



Pogue, who also scripted DRAGONHEART, sought to capture the flavor of Robert E. Howard's prose.

lines of THE VIKINGS or SPARTACUS—something with a brain that really requires acting, and something that was definitive Robert Howard. I said let's go for a really mature, multi-leveled [film] like they used to make in the old days. Also, I think if you watch the first Conan movie and then watch the second one, the mistake that they made going from 'R' to 'PG' is that we had a much more interesting first movie (although I still think that one is flawed) and a kiddie movie in the second one.

"The first Conan I turned in was in February '92. We had to change some of it eventually. What happened was that in the Spring of '93, Rob Cohen came on as director for awhile." Cohen was only on the project for a few months, and then dropped out because the plan was to shoot the film in Malta, which Cohen didn't want to do. But

during the time he was there Chuck Pogue got a taste of what it would be like to work with Cohen when they later did DRAGONHEART together.

"I remember once we were doing a note session on KULL and he came in with his reader's notes. He may have read the script once or twice, but he hadn't really read it carefully, and he was basing all his notes on his reader's notes. There was a scene in the middle of the script where it talks about the Breath of Valka and it gives the whole origin and mythology, and he wanted to cut the scene! It was obvious that he hadn't read it and Raffaella and I are sitting there telling him, 'Rob, you can't cut that scene. The whole second half of the movie depends on that scene! If you don't set that stuff up, no one's going to understand what you're talking about.'

"He just really couldn't get it and ultimately he got very vehement and nasty with Raffaella's development person because he said [to her], 'Do you understand this?' And she said, 'Well yes, of course.' And he blew up and said, 'Well if *she* understands it!' and he started to denigrate this girl who had more knowledge of literature and drama than he could ever hope to have, and he stormed out of the room, basically because he hadn't done his homework and he had gotten caught. He looked like a fool in front of all of us and so he broke up the meeting. Rob Cohen was this neurotic, emotionally frightened man who if he couldn't usurp your



Sorbo as Kull, fighting the leaders of Valusia to restore freedom. Inset right: Pogue wanted to cast Thomas Ian Griffith as Kull.



CHARLES EDWARD POGUE

“I would have done anything for Raffaella [DeLaurentiis] except the two things she asked me to do, which were to compromise my integrity, and compromise my writing...”

cess. There was no director on it. But my [Universal development] executive [Hal Lieberman] thought I had done a pretty good job.

“Two weeks later it came through the executive that [the script] had been rejected. I had some fears before that maybe this whole rewrite had been designed to throw me off, give me impossible notes and then not give me help with it. So upon my dismissal

from the project, against my will, I wrote a letter to Lieberman:

“It didn’t take a seer to predict this eventuality,” Pogue wrote. “The plot to engineer me off of KULL wasn’t subtle, and the plot was aided and abetted by the fact that I received absolutely no help or input from my producer. A year ago the studio green-lit this script. Both you and my producer called it brilliant and multi-leveled and deep. You know as well as I this has nothing to do with artistry or talent or merit or what is deserved.”

Universal and DeLaurentiis brought in another writer, Don Mancini. “I think we went from a multifaceted, multidimensional script to a one-dimensional, simplified version of what had been a very mature piece of work,” said Pogue.

As an example of this, Pogue cited Mancini’s use of dialogue for the villainess previously heard spoken by Darth Vader in *THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK*: “I’ve altered our pact. Pray I don’t alter it further.”

Dialogue had been a sticking point in Pogue’s script. “People were really scared of [my] dialogue,” he said. “People don’t understand that words to be spoken are different from words to be read. My edict was Robert Howard and I wanted dialogue

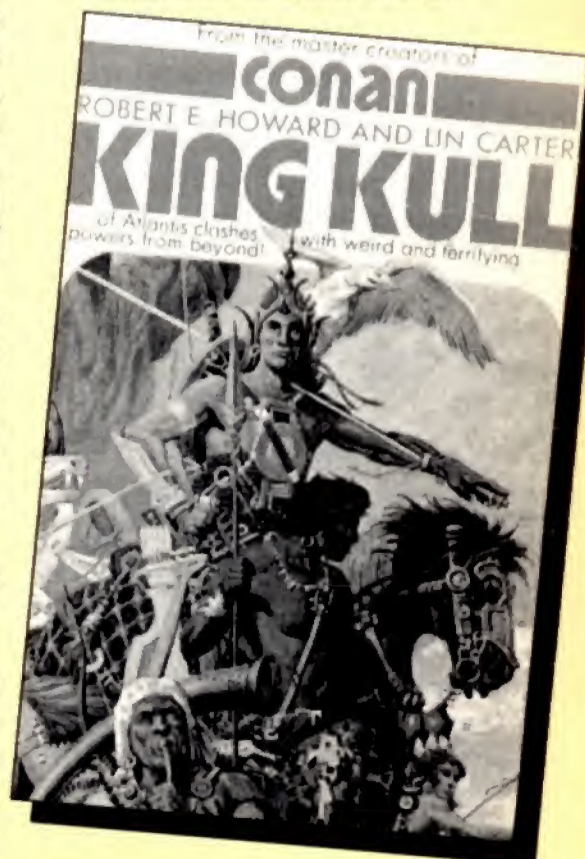
with panache. I want dialogue that rolls off the tongue.

“I fought this fight on *DRAGONHEART* where Rob Cohen kept banalizing dialogue right and left. Let them speak better than real life. This is drama. Everything is more accentuated. And if nothing proved it, it should have been proven well beyond a shadow of a doubt during the [KULL] auditions where actors were just drooling over this language, saying, ‘We never get words like this. We never get dialogue like this.’

“I think you have to be very true to the core of the piece, and again my guide was Robert Howard. As I started out I wanted the definitive Robert Howard movie. I wanted that moody blood and thunder prose, and colors and depths. And get into that these people have more than one facet, more than one agenda. People with contradictions. I wanted real life characters and that’s what spoke to Kevin Hooks on it, and that’s

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Howard’s Kull stories were published in book form, which Lin Carter finished after the author’s death.



talent, or take credit for it, would try to destroy it; and just the anxiety that you had in meetings with him and his spewing and his venom and his nastiness. I was really glad to see him go.”

After Cohen left, Kevin Hooks came on as director and stayed with KULL for quite some time. “He was a terrific director,” said Pogue. “He really took to the script and liked the blend of action and the depth of character married to the action, which is something you don’t see in these things very often.”

Hooks and Pogue screen-tested many actors for the role of KULL. “Eventually we found an actor, named Thomas Ian Griffith, who we decided we wanted. He did a brilliant job. When I saw this screen test I wanted to go out and write KULL II because I was so stoked. Raffaella and Kevin and I were ready to go. We said this is the guy. This is it. Let’s go shoot the movie, but we couldn’t get him past the brass. They didn’t know what they wanted but it wasn’t him for some reason.”

Even when it was suggested that Universal could save a lot of money by filming KULL back-to-back with *DRAGONHEART* in Slovakia in 1994, the studio still wouldn’t make a decision. Ultimately Kevin Hooks

left KULL because of these protracted delays, and Pogue feels that this is the most crippling blow the film suffered.

“Kevin would have been a superb director,” said Pogue. “He would have given them a great movie with anybody in the lead role. If I had the power to pick any director I could work with, he is one of two directors I would pick. The two guys who didn’t direct my movies are the guys who should have directed them. Patrick Read Johnson is the guy who should have directed *DRAGONHEART*, and Kevin Hooks should have directed KULL. I lamented and mourned that loss more than anything else on the movie, with the exception of me getting thrown off the film, which is the next horror story.”

It was while *DRAGONHEART* was filming in Slovakia that Pogue had a falling out with DeLaurentiis, who sided with Cohen on script changes the director wanted and Pogue opposed.

Though Universal retained Pogue as scripter on KULL, DeLaurentiis refused to work with him or pass on basic information, such as the casting of Kevin Sorbo in the lead role.

“I wrote [another] draft with no feedback at all from my producer, or from my star,” Pogue explained. “I was not given ac-

before. So too had production designer Benjamin Fernandez. Director of photography Rodney Charters had lit *PSYCHO IV* and *STEPHEN KING'S SLEEPWALKERS* before teaming up with director Nicolella on the *NASH BRIDGES* television series. Recalled Nicolella, "When I introduced Rodney to Don Johnson [the star of *NASH BRIDGES*], Johnson said, 'He does great faces.' That's important in a fantasy—there are some things you mustn't lose for the sake of style. Rodney is a ballsy New Zealander who's not afraid to take chances. We fight all the time, that's the way we work for the best results."

Cost is naturally the reason why *KULL THE CONQUEROR* was based in Bratislava which



lies just inside the Slovakian border, 60 kilometers from Vienna, the nearest international airport. "You do get more for your money here", admitted Raffaella DeLaurentiis. "I first came to Bratislava at the beginning of 1994 to scout locations for *DRAGONHEART* and had such a wonderful experience I couldn't wait to return. I wanted to shoot *DAYLIGHT* here, but Sylvester Stallone insisted on Rome. Look around you. Isn't it just so spectacular? It looks like a fairytale country before you even start adding your own fantasy elements. It's a friendly place to work, the soundstages at Koliba are every bit as good as the ones in Hollywood, the technicians are artisans and

DIRECTOR JOHN NICOLELLA

"I screamed [at producer DeLaurentiis] 'Everybody thinks I'm a greedy prick!' and she yelled back 'You are!!' Hey, that's my job. I have to make KULL work 24 hours a day."



Kull's journey takes him to the ice caves of the frigid North, with Zareta (below). L: Sorbo as Kull, with no fear of comparison to Schwarzenegger.



it's a film-friendly community. So much production value is added to the screen just by being here." In fact, Hollywood seems to have cottoned on to Bratislava; George Clooney's pre *BATMAN AND ROBIN* movie, *THE PEACEMAKER*, was shot concurrently with *KULL THE CONQUEROR*, and a whole slate of international productions are set to follow.

Asked what the Bratislava experience has meant to him and John Nicolella replied, "One day only! You know what it's like when you're filming. You get up, leave the hotel, get to the studio, go back to the hotel. I'm here just to come to work. In a living sense it means nothing, but in a working sense it means I can afford to use more toys, be more flexible

and pay less for what in San Francisco would cost three times more. Plus we have the time to make it work. The downside has been we haven't had any Summer and while we were told by those who should know that it never rains in Croatia in September, it rained every day we were there—the first time in 25 years apparently. Those elements have been hard to cope with. But through it all Raffaella has made it work and kept spirits up. She really is the most tenacious producer I've ever worked with—and the best."

Noted Nicolella of DeLaurentiis, "Her approach to producing comes out of an experienced logic and a journeyman work ethic. She'll get her hands dirty. She's always there when you need her and she understands everything all the time. She's also a pain in the ass and we fight like brother and sister. The other day I screamed, 'Everybody thinks I'm a greedy prick!' and she yelled back, 'You are!!' Hey, that's my job. I have to make *KULL* work 24 hours a day. That's what I'm currently living for. So is Raffaella, except she has to make it for this amount of money on that schedule. I want *KULL THE CONQUEROR* to be in the same class as *CASPER*, *BATMAN* and *THE FLINTSTONES*. Raffaella is ensuring we are all making world class entertainment."

DeLaurentiis added, "All movies present different challenges and the main one here has been to make a fun, thrill-packed fantasy that everyone will enjoy. All the key elements are there: a good story, a great script, magical special effects, a wonderful cast—Tia Carrere is bringing a delicious sense of evil fun to her role as Aki-vasha—with the icing on the cake being Kevin Sorbo. We've signed him to a two picture deal but we'll finish *KULL THE CONQUEROR* first and take a long hard look before we make a decision about any sequels."

Meanwhile, the *KULL* sets are being left intact at Koliba Studios, just like the *DRAGONHEART* ones before it, because who knows when they might be needed again... □

Universal Pictures opens KULL nationwide on August 29.

Kull

LITEFOOT

Bringing his own depth and spirituality to Kull's sidekick.

By Alan Jones

KULL's Ascalante is played by rap artist Litefoot, who has travelled throughout the reservations and schools of the U.S.A. giving concerts to promote cultural identity and awareness among young Native Americans. Litefoot has released four albums and made his feature film debut in the title role of *THE INDIAN IN THE CUPBOARD*. He can also be seen in *MORTAL KOMBAT: ANNIHILATION*. The sequel opens November 28

"The reason I was attracted to the role of Ascalante is because it's a big departure from anything I've done in the past," said Litefoot. "I wanted to show that Native American people are capable of playing many different characters rather than just the obvious ones. It was something I felt necessary to do."

Noted Litefoot, "Ascalante is a holy man, who, when we first see him, is acting like a madman, ranting on about this ancient god that no one believes in. But it turns out as the story progresses that there's a lot more truth to it than anyone expected."

The biggest lesson to be learned in

Kull rescues Ascalante from being tortured. Ascalante—considered more madman than holy man—prophesies the coming of an ancient god, which proves true as Akavasha's reign of darkness emerges.

KULL THE CONQUEROR is how to use the mind to keep your enemies at bay, not your fists, according to Litefoot. "Ascalante doesn't kill people or commit himself to fighting," he said. "His challenge is to channel his fighting instincts in a positive way without using them. When he decides to save Kull in the Ice Cathedral, that action is what spells his own doom. Often you only have to deviate once from what you should be doing, to get yourself into a whole lot of trouble. As is so often in real life, that also proves to be the case for Ascalante."

Director John Nicolella was a huge inspiration for Litefoot with regards his grasp of Ascalante's character. "When I first sat down and talked to John I realized he knew exactly what he wanted with this movie," said Litefoot. "Everything was planned down to the last detail. That's something you need as an actor and I strived off his vision and expanded it. I drew things out of my own personality to stay on track with Ascalante's. I always look to the positive and am true to myself. Sometimes it's hard to deal with reality but that's what I think is the core of Ascalante and I've related to that a lot."




Native American actor and rap artist Litefoot plays holy man Ascalante, Kull's trusted companion.

As far as Litefoot is concerned, Kevin Sorbo has been a dream to work with. "You know, I keep waiting for those horrendous Hollywood stories to come true," said Litefoot. "That person's bad, this star's nasty, she's a bitch. But nothing remotely like that has ever happened to me. Surely I can't just be the lucky one? Kevin has been wonderful and we're always laughing and having enormous fun on the set. It makes the time fly by when you're far away from home and your family. Actually the extensive blue screen work I'm doing has given me fond memories of *THE INDIAN IN THE CUPBOARD*."

Noted Litefoot, "KULL THE CONQUEROR is not your typical Sword and Sorcery fantasy. Yes, there's nobility in the action, a Robin Hood-style message and physical and mental strength along *CONAN* lines, but in a different mix than you've seen before. It has probably been my most difficult assignment to date because of that. I didn't want to be a typical priest caught up in his own reverence. Every scene Ascalante appears in must show a little more of what he's trying to aspire to. There's a strength in his wisdom that greatly affects his relationship with Kull." □





SNOW WHITE IN THE BLACK FOREST

The fairy tale returns to its roots in Showtime's gothic chiller.

By Alan Jones

There was a girl with skin as white as snow, cheeks as red as blood and eyes as black as ebony. She had a wicked stepmother who consulted an enchanted mirror and she escaped a vengeful murder attempt to live with seven dwarfs in a dark forest. Then, after lying comatose from biting a poisoned apple, she was awoken from the evil spell by handsome Prince Charming. Right?

Wrong! That's how it was in the landmark 1937 Walt Disney cartoon version of SNOW WHITE AND THE SEVEN DWARFS, but it's not what the Brothers Grimm wrote when they published folklore tales from around the world for publication in 1812. Nor is what even they recorded for posterity the full story either. Banking on the fact audiences will indeed be interested in learning the roots of what is the

most famous fairytale in western literature, Polygram Film International, with their subsidiary company Interscope Communications, shot SNOW WHITE IN THE BLACK FOREST on location in the Czech Republic during late 1995, with interiors based at Barrandov Studios in Prague. Sigourney Weaver stars in the \$30 million gothic chiller, which will have its world premiere (with a name change to SNOW WHITE: A TALE OF TERROR) on Showtime August 24.

The oral tale of "Snow White" has existed for over six centuries in the folklore of many diverse cultures. The Celtic version features a jealous Queen named Silver-Tree threatening the younger Gold-Tree. In Icelandic myth, heroine Vildridr "fairer than Vala" escapes to a small house carved of stone and inhabited by two dwarfs. The Norwegian derivation has a giant's daughter prick

Sigourney Weaver stars in a new and different version of "Snow White," with Monica Keena (above), told from the point of view of the wicked witch. Weaver, (below) as Claudia, the new wife of Frederick (Sam Neill), happiness before the storm of meeting her stepdaughter, Lilli, the snow white lass of the title.





Weaver, disguised as an old crone in makeup by Linda Devetta, offers Lilli (Keena) a poisoned apple. Both characters are portrayed as psychologically driven and more complex than the Disney cartoon everyone remembers. Showtime airs the world premiere of the \$30 million Polygram production on August 24.

her finger and, inspired by the blood on the snow, wish for a daughter with pure white skin and red lips. In warmer climates, the story substitutes snow for milk. And while the French-Canadian fable "Le Miroir Qui Parle/The Speaking Mirror" differs in detail from the Louisiana saga of "King Peacock," they are all recognizable variants of what we have come to know as the "Snow White" legend.

What the pioneering Wilhelm and Jacob Grimm did was take these oral anecdotes handed down through many cross-cultural generations and modify them with traditional texts to produce a new written form they termed pre-Christian Teutonic literature. Other tales given the same treatment were "The Frog Prince," "Little Red Riding Hood," "Cinderella," "The Dancing Princess," "The Singing Bone," "Hansel & Gretel," "Rumpelstiltskin" and "The Cobbler and the Elves." Often condemned for being more "fake-lore" than folklore by critics unimpressed by their false claims of historical authenticity, the German natives nevertheless fashioned a unique and enduring genre as much informed by nationalism and heritage as embellished with romance and imagination.

However, even the Brothers Grimm tended to embroider on their own "authorita-

tive" texts each time they published a new updated volume. In the 17 editions of what was originally called *Grimm's Household Tales* published between 1812 and 1856, the "Snow White" story subtly changed by varying degrees. Originally the evil Queen was Snow White's natural mother and she heartlessly abandoned her daughter while both picked flowers close to the woods. It was also her father who discovered her spellbound in the forest and she was awoken, not by a kiss, but with her body being tied by ropes connected to four corners of a palace room. The Queen was then tortured in a climactic Dance of Death, forced to wear red-hot iron shoes. SNOW WHITE IN THE BLACK FOREST director Michael Cohn pointed out, "Even the Grimms

thought such ideas were too scary. Having a mother do something like that to her own daughter was too shocking even for them. Their editorial change to a stepmother to make the story more 'acceptable' was a very significant one because it altered the narrative subtext enormously. People could cope with a family 'interloper' it seemed, not the truthful familial bond." Other minor changes were subsequently made and refined: the huntsman ordered to kill Snow White and return with her liver and lungs as proof; the prince's two disgruntled servants accidentally reviving her by striking her coffin in anger and dislodging the poisoned apple stuck in her throat. Finally the good and bad aspects of the Queen were turned into independent characters to position the famous 'Mir-

ror, Mirror, on the wall, Who's the fairest one of all?' plea—not spoken in this version—in the clearest black and white terms.

These "improvements" continued constantly through various reprints by anonymous writers right up until 1937 when Walt Disney set his seal on the legend with his animated classic SNOW WHITE AND THE SEVEN DWARFS. SNOW WHITE IN THE BLACK FOREST producer Tom Engelman remarked, "You'd be hard-pressed to find an individual now who would answer, 'The Brothers Grimm' to the question 'Who wrote 'Snow White?'" They'd all say Disney." It was precisely for this reason that Engelman thought a back-to-basics version of the "Snow White" myth was not only long overdue but also a highly commercial prospect.

"It was four years ago and I was reading the Grimm tale to my young niece," said Engelman. "And as I was reading, I felt this sudden rush of discovery. Here was an untouched—at least by filmmakers—malevolent roller-coaster ride dealing with a young girl surviving a tough ordeal and emerging from it as a strong and determined woman. Not only that. In the course of her brutal experiences she's forced to descend into her own private Hell (the spell cast by the Queen) and

In this true-to-life version, Weaver is driven to distraction by her obnoxious step-daughter, in a \$30 million horror version directed by Michael Cohn.



must face her psychological confusion and some terrifying personal demons."

Over the past decade Engelman has been involved with the blockbusters *BIG* and *WORKING GIRL* as well as *BLACK WIDOW*, *THE TEMP* and *TERMINAL VELOCITY*. So he found it relatively easy to talk Polygram into financing such clearly rich material as "Snow White." Added Engelman, "Dependent on script and cast approval, naturally." As far as the script was concerned, Engelman wanted it written from the premise "That we were telling the real behind-the-scenes story from which a potent myth would soon arise. Although it's only seven pages long, it is imbued with poetry and mythic language, and I wanted that captured. I insisted each image be analyzed for what lay behind it, too. For example, who is Prince Charming? Is it someone she already knows, or a stranger? Who her real Prince would seem to be and who it actually is are two entirely different things. Also the idea of Kings and Queens seemed outdated. In the late 15th century, when our story is set, powerful people tended to be barons or landowners. It was vitally important that we made specific what the Brothers Grimm left general; interpret the poetic images to reflect a more realistic, historic and accurate truth."

That's why there aren't seven dwarfs in *SNOW WHITE IN THE BLACK FOREST*—just one. Noted Engelman, "We call them Outcasts in the script, not through political correctness gone mad, but because in our minds these characters would be more incomplete men in some shape and form. We didn't want to define them all as physical dwarfs although gap-toothed Bart does fit that description." The other six Outcasts are Pock (blind in one eye with a stump as a right hand), Scar (with a perpetually scowling face due to childhood trauma), Rolf (gaunt with huge teeth and a lantern jaw), Konrad (a colossal mongoloid), Father Gilbert (bald and obese) and Will (handsome but branded on one cheek).

"The main image we worked from with the Outcasts were the gang in *THE WILD BUNCH*,"

"SNOW WHITE deals with dysfunctional family values, Freudian fears and the obsession with beauty," said producer Tom Engelman. "It's primal stuff!"



Weaver as the old hag tricks Lilli (Keena) into eating the poisoned apple. Below: The sleeping Lilli is buried with reverence, in a stained glass coffin by her protectors, the seven outcasts, filmed on location in Prague.



said Engelman. "They were a mob of misfits held together by a code which had grown out of an unspoken need to be together. Suddenly, into the band comes an outside force—Snow White—and they become an odd family unit where each gets something special from the other side."

SNOW WHITE IN THE BLACK FOREST is just one of the many fairytales recently given a '90s refit by the film industry. Made prior to *SNOW WHITE* at the same Prague stu-

dios was Steve Barron's *THE LEGEND OF PINOCCHIO*, with new versions of *PETER PAN* (producer John Hughes), *CINDERELLA* (starring Janet Jackson), *RUMPELSTILTSKIN* (director Mark Jones) and a German *HANSEL AND GRETEL* still to come. Engelman pointed out, "Fairytales are back in vogue because their source material is so strong and they are ideal for the new special effects technology. You can also use them to raise important

contemporary issues. *SNOW WHITE* deals with dysfunctional family values, blood ties, Freudian fears and the obsession with beauty. Physical beauty, as in the Cult of the Supermodel, is probably one of the greatest forms of modern magic because it does indeed cast a spell. That's why 'Snow White' has had such staying power over the centuries. It's primal stuff!"

Not that the name "Snow White" is featured anywhere but in the title of the screenplay initially written by Tom Szollosi, Stephen Metcalfe and Deborah Serra. It begins in Germany, 1493, with Frederick Hoffman (Sam Neill) cutting a child from his dying wife's womb after she has been impaled on a tree in a shocking carriage accident. Lilli (Monica Keena) is the name "Snow White" is christened with here and she is clearly not thrilled when her father marries for a second time, taking the exquisitely beautiful and narcissistically vain Claudia Alvisé (Sigourney Weaver) as his wife. Claudia brings with her only an ornate, hand-carved Vanity containing a large, flawless mirror, and this mysterious piece of furniture is what compels the new Mrs. Hoffman to alienate Lilli and cast her to the wolves in the forest.

Engelman noted, "The basic image in *SNOW WHITE* is Claudia's mirror and our interpretation of it is two-fold. It could be Claudia's alter-ego, the reflected ravings of a mad woman and the excuse for her hallucinations. Or it could be a supernatural entity taking on a form that's most pleasing to Claudia—herself! We deliberately never answer that question to keep the psychological readings complex. Nor is Lilli a naive individual who doesn't even think twice about taking a bite from an apple offered to her by a complete stranger. She's smarter than that. One of the reasons why Claudia doesn't like her is because Lilli hasn't even tried to make an effort. From the moment she arrived in the household, Claudia has sought Lilli's approval and has had it thrown in her face. The turning point comes when Lilli turns up in her mother's ballgown at a party and takes all the attention away from Claudia.

SNOW WHITE

SIGOURNEY WEAVER

Weaver on her wicked star turn as the Evil Queen.

By Alan Jones

For the haughty, proud, beautiful and maniacally deranged Claudia Alvis, producer Tom Engelman and director Michael Cohn only had one actress in mind as the archetypal Wicked Stepmother in SNOW WHITE IN THE BLACK FOREST. Engelman had worked with Sigourney Weaver before on WORKING GIRL and had no hesitation in offering the ALIEN trilogy star the key role in his heartless fairytale. Plus a \$4 million fee!

But Weaver was attracted to the Claudia role for numerous reasons, as she explained. "I'd just played two intensely demanding roles in DEATH AND THE MAIDEN and COPYCAT and I wanted a change. SNOW WHITE really intrigued me because it was written like the Jacobean plays I studied at drama school. Frankly, I'm not offered many parts where I can be just a plain out and out sex goddess. Between Charles Knode's costumes, Linda Devetta's makeup and Francesca Crowder's hair designs, I really do look fabulous—although I say it myself! Everyday I've been transformed into this voraciously beautiful woman. It's something I haven't been asked to do before and that's the main reason why I showed initial interest in this script four years ago when the original producer, Robert Cort, first mentioned it."

Weaver said she only likes to do one film per year, so she chooses her scripts carefully. Noted Weaver, "What intrigued me about the script was this idea of why a woman with so



Sigourney Weaver brews a wicked apple. Polygram paid the star of the ALIEN series and GHOSTBUSTERS \$4 million for her key performance.

much to give, and so many excellent qualities, would suddenly feel worthless in one day. It was all in the relationships and they really interested me. When women look in a mirror, if they feel good about themselves, then they look pretty. But if they feel they are unable to give love or are unhappy, then they feel neutered as women. Here was a great opportunity to ex-

plore all that in the 'Mirror, Mirror, On the Wall' idea, time to investigate it both as a woman and an actress. Beauty is all in the mind—and I believe that. If you are giving and receiving in life, you are vital and interesting—and beautiful. It doesn't matter what age you are."

Yet beauty is only one part of it, claimed Weaver. "I cut all

the lines from the script about Lilli's beauty because I do feel Claudia's problem has a lot to do with her husband, Frederick," said Weaver. "Basically, Lilli won't let me have any time with him and Frederick always seems to take her side. From the outset Lilli doesn't give Claudia a chance and that hurts her. Here she is trying to give Frederick the united family he so desperately wants, but Lilli refuses to think of her as anything but a villainess over the nine-year period of adjustment. And because she's trying, unsuccessfully, to conceive her own child as well, it's a nullifying experience as she thinks of herself as the perfect woman. Then Lilli flaunts herself at the ball wearing her mother's dress, and then she loses the precious baby she wanted so much. It's the end of her life, the end of her trying to make peace with Lilli, and the end of her sanity."

Once on board the SNOW WHITE project, Weaver did take time to read the Brothers Grimm original story. "I got a lot from it, mainly the relationship between Lilli, Claudia and Frederick being so Freudian," said Weaver. "It's like a Greek tragedy because by the end even Lilli has become a killer. No one escapes. We are all responsible. We all make terrible mistakes and we suffer because of them. Especially my character. We all start life with the same elements, but some of us put them in the wrong crucible.."

"I always felt the problem with the SNOW WHITE story was that you knew nothing about the Frederick character and you could never understand



Weaver mixes an evil potion (left). Her mind snaps (right) when Claudia has a miscarriage of her child with Frederick. She fixates on her troubling stepdaughter as the source of her misfortune. Weaver claims the key to Claudia is that she starts out normal, with high hopes, but things don't work out for her.

why this nice guy would pick someone so obviously horrible for his new wife. It was vitally important for me to make it clear that Claudia and Frederick are madly in love at the beginning and that's what Lilli resents. Then when she changes from the perfect wife into the worthless mother of a stillborn child, that's when she looks hideous in her mirror and blames Lilli for everything."

Weaver admitted it was the mirror sequences that proved to be the most difficult to work out in the context of this new reading of SNOW WHITE. "Is it supernatural or psychological?" she mused. "We have actually filmed it from both angles to see which works best. Personally I don't think the supernatural route is the one to go. Claudia is not as effective a personality that way. I see the mirror image more as her calm, reassuring, alter-ego saying things like, 'Look, you've got to do this because so-and-so is out to fuck you' or 'Snap out of it, it's going to be all right if you follow my instructions.' It may have been more interesting to go over-the-top with it, but it's certainly nowhere near as truthful. Claudia is terrified someone is behind all of her bad fortune. Lilli is her closest target so she's the one. I have no idea which slant director Michael Cohn will finally take but I'm certain it will be the one that makes the most narrative sense in the long run."

The challenge for Weaver with her character was not to let Claudia slip into camp. "That's the real danger of this part and I'm trying to avoid it with every cell," said Weaver. "There are some delicious moments where I've tried to stay in middle ground—the scene where she seduces Peter Rutenberg [Lilli's sweetheart] at the top of the stairs and licks her lips when he leaves—but it's such a fine line. I don't want to make Claudia funny when she's savoring the irony of her cruelties. I want her evil grounded in essential humanity."

SNOW WHITE IN THE BLACK FOREST was originally going to present a new side to Weaver for her huge and devoted male following to wax lyrical over. Yes, Claudia sings! Although Weaver brought her singing teacher over from New York to help her train, it was decided to dub her in the finished

cut. "I was all prepared to do it but then they kept adding more and more singing scenes," said Weaver. "It became this big deal so in the end they got a proper singer—thank goodness! She sings when Lilli runs through the woods and keeps on singing when she gets more and more disturbed. It was yet another problem to deal with so I'm glad I didn't do it in the end, although I do sound quite nice, I must say."

Weaver always researches her roles in detail and never starts a film unless she is clear in her head about the character she is going to play. And she saw the Wicked Stepmother/Claudia as one of the classic figures in western literature. "At her best she most definitely is," said Weaver. "The key to Claudia is that she starts out as normal as the rest of us. She isn't evil. There's a reference in the script about her mother's dabbling in

witchcraft but we decided not to shoot it. What I love about her is she comes into this new life with all her hopes and dreams flying high. But things don't work out for her and that's maybe the Brothers Grimm. Life is cruel. It doesn't always reward goodness and innocence and that's true for all of us. Michael [Cohn] tried to make me meaner in certain scenes but I didn't see Claudia that way at all. You don't need to do that when you have scenes where the mirror tells her to 'steal Frederick's seed and bathe the child in the father's blood.' I get to play the full range between silent movie goddess and Black Widow in SNOW WHITE and it's been a joy."

But will it be a ratings success? "If they position it well and make everyone aware it isn't a cartoon and is completely antithetical to what Disney's version was about," said Weaver. "Whether it makes money or not is not really my first concern these days. I'm interested in doing a variety of roles and I chose this because it was a great story—it always was. If you don't care how a movie does in America, you are open to so many more exciting career possibilities. Naturally, I hope this does well in America. I've been very lucky with my commercial successes there. Yet, like ALIEN 3, I think SNOW WHITE IN THE BLACK FOREST has a more European feel and not just because the source material is European to begin with." □

Happier moments with Frederick (Sam Neill) before tragedy strikes. Weaver sees this SNOW WHITE in real psychological terms, not as fantasy.



These are two very clever individuals battling to see who comes out on top."

With the addition of a "Beauty and the Beast" strand, one of the Outcasts turning traitor, Claudia's enigmatic brother, Gustav, and a major sequence played out against the Black Death, Polygram found the multi-layered draft script for *SNOW WHITE IN THE BLACK FOREST* acceptable. All they needed now was a director. Recalled Engelman, "We met with over 30 directors on this project from big names with hit movies to complete unknowns, and only Michael Cohn understood what we were trying to make. Most directors had a hard time with the Historical Horror category, but Michael appreciated the gothic Thriller approach where the important elements of shock and terror would not be shielded away from. He fully embraced the dark philosophy of the piece. I didn't want a technology-driven movie at the expense of character and Michael's past two films proved he knew how to build suspense, how to handle special effects and let the actors work in a natural vein. Sure, he was untested at this professional and budgetary level, yet that was part of the fun. We took a leap of faith."

After receiving a master's degree in Communications and Film Production from the University of Texas in 1984, Michael Cohn taught at that establishment about every aspect of the filmmaking process for six years. In 1991, he took leave from the university to direct the \$2 million borderline science fiction Vidmark release *INTERCEPTOR*, starring Jurgen Prochnow as a hi-tech stealth bomber hijacker. The following year he resigned from his teaching position to direct the Turner Home Video psycho thriller *WHEN THE BOUGH BREAKS*, based on his own screenplay, starring Martin Sheen.

Cohn's involvement with *SNOW WHITE IN THE BLACK FOREST* actually began when he went to Interscope to pitch a script as a possible HBO project. "That didn't work out but they called me back and asked me to read the *SNOW WHITE* script for my opinions," said Cohn. "It was an early draft

"Who else would have been the perfect stepmother? Sigourney fought Aliens and Ghostbusters!" Engelman joked. "Only she could bring that level of evil intensity."



Reality behind the myth: six of the seven outcasts who protect Lilli from Claudia's wrath, with only one dwarf among the lot of them.

and it had gone through many changes and writers over the three-year period. The original title was *THE GRIMM BROTHERS: SNOW WHITE IN THE BLACK FOREST*. But they thought it was at a promising place for yet another departure point. I agreed with their assessment and in the next eight weeks talked to them four more times about direction and tone until they signed me up."

From the opening gory birth scene and her stepmother dancing with the bloody entrails of what she assumes is Lilli's heart, to the cave-in at the Outcast's mine and Claudia's deranged demise in a house of mirrors, *SNOW WHITE IN THE BLACK FOREST* has no shortage of nasty, exciting or scary sequences. Noted Cohn, "I've tried to root the violent and grotesque moments in realism so they aren't either too gratuitous or softened down. Mostly I've tried to deal in surrealistic dream images that have a basis in nature. The hideous image of the spider emerging from a wound in Gustav's hand being a good example. Claudia's miscarriage scene, a pivotal event that sends her over

the edge, is blood-spattered but not overly gory. The rating must be a hard PG-13. I have no interest in throwing buckets of blood over the story. It would be a mistake. Audiences don't want that now, they want to be scared and unsettled more."

What Polygram wanted was some measure of box office insurance to protect their sizeable investment in *SNOW WHITE*. They got it when Sigourney Weaver came on board the project at a very early stage. Producer Tom Engelman joked, "Who else would have been the perfect Claudia? Sigourney has fought *ALIENS* and *GHOSTBUSTERS*, for heaven's sake! Rarely have I ever had an actress so firmly in mind from the very beginning. It was a case of, if I can't make this with Sigourney, then it isn't worth making at all. Only she could bring a level of evil intensity to Claudia without sacrificing her humanity or intelligence. Claudia was the hero of her own story and she had to be real and be played straight. Sigourney also favors first-time talent and I saw it as a major plus when she too was convinced Michael would be the best director."

Added Cohn, "Sigourney

harbors an emotional and psychic strength that is incendiary. We needed an actress who would dimensionalize the role and bring to life one of the most fascinating characters in literary history. Sigourney was dream casting and this would be inconceivable without her. She is just a great combination of the right elements: strength, commanding physical stature, and a darkness in her persona. Oh, and let's not forget she's incredibly beautiful too! Sigourney has been brilliant in her scenes with the mirror and has brought out every venomous nuance and Black Widow facet of the complex character. As she plays it, the mirror could be a fragment of her own psyche, her id, or even some vestige of her own mother. There are implications that the Vanity is a talisman willed to her so the spirit of her mother can always be close by."

With regards to casting Lilli, Engelman and Cohn went through hundreds of audition tapes from actresses both in America and Europe and for a short while Alicia (*CLUELESS*) Silverstone was a major contender. Noted Cohn, "It was a numbing experience. We didn't have a specific type in mind, we were just waiting for someone to walk in and we'd know she was the one. That happened with Monica Keena. She had the face of a Botticelli angel but also a level of toughness that would be a requisite for a girl from this time period. You could thrust her into a forest, hurl 100 m.p.h. winds at her and topple trees around her, but you know she'd cope and survive to become strong enough to take on Sigourney Weaver. Also Monica was 16 years old, at precisely the same transition age as Lilli was in the script. We could have cast an older actress but then we wouldn't have captured that ingenuous quality. It felt dangerous to cast Monica and that's why we did it." Monica Keena's only credit of note to date is *WHILE YOU WERE SLEEPING*.

Principal photography on *SNOW WHITE IN THE BLACK FOREST* began October 2, 1995, and finished in the third week of December. Prague was chosen as the base of operations according to Engelman, "Because this was the one film

community that had the people we wanted to be part of the creative team combined with unspoiled locations. Pernstyn castle at Brno doubled as the Hoffman residence and for exteriors we went to Kost. Our Black Forest is the woods at Jevany. We did look at six other East European countries but this had the stark, gothic, brutal feeling we couldn't find elsewhere. Part of the success of SNOW WHITE is being able to capture the Czech Republic feel that predates the Kafkaesque look. And it's amazing to think Barrandov Studios is where Adolf Hitler produced many Nazi propaganda films."

Michael Cohn couldn't be more aware of how much a quantum leap in his directing career SNOW WHITE IN THE BLACK FOREST represents. "A day hasn't gone by without my heart skipping a few beats," he said. "I was terrified by the daunting prospect because it was such a huge jump in budgetary responsibility and project complexity. I'm still pinching myself. Filmmaking is very much a war of attrition and if you are still standing at the end of production then you've succeeded. Here we are spending Fall and Winter in snow-covered, freezing, flu-ridden Prague making a movie with huge amounts of action, special effects and locations. It certainly hasn't been easy but it has been a rather demented pleasure." □

Monica Keena as Lilli, free from Claudia's overbearing presence in the forest, but no wide-eyed innocent.



SNOW WHITE

MAKEUP & EFFECTS

The visual tricks behind-the-scenes, plus Linda Devetta on prosthetics.

By Alan Jones

Ernie Farino supervised the visual effects work on SNOW WHITE for Fantasy II Film Effects, Inc., and was on the set in Czechoslovakia to insure that background plates were filmed correctly. CGI was used for the scene where Snow White, under the witch's sleeping spell, is discovered by the Outcasts. "She's discovered with a carpet of birds protecting her, but when they approach they take flight," he said. "That's impossible to do with birds on a real person. So we had the birds perched on a blue mannequin in Monica Keena's shape and shot the whole sequence against a blue screen surrounded by netting so they couldn't escape."

Blue screen was going to be used for Snow White's carriage ride at the beginning, but Farina devised a better idea. "We had to devise another solution for the opening carriage ride ending in the crash," he said. "Naturally, you have to see the landscape roll by as the characters talk in the foreground and, originally, this was going to be shot on location with a blue screen eventually put behind it. But the wooden lattice work on the carriage window grilles meant if the camera focused on the characters, the background would be out of focus causing enormous problems down the



Sigourney Weaver in hag makeup designed and applied by Linda Devetta using Swiss Dermplast.

line if you are doing blue screen mattes. Instead I had art director Peter Russell build a rotating platform and put real trees on it that we could move continuously past the window. It took a certain amount of effort to structure, but the illusion was perfect. Fixing it in post-production would have been a nightmare and you don't want to start off the entire film with a dodgy effect."

While computer digitals were used to put a moon in the sky with clouds passing by and to remove an air bag for one particular stunt where someone plunges from a high castle window, the main body of Farino's work has been to do with the

evil mirror. He said, "Sigourney Weaver has to perform to her reflection and she needed to look at it on video playback and then copy it exactly or, in one case where she's transformed momentarily into Lilli, mimic Monica's actions so we could dissolve the two images together. She had to make sure her hands were matching, things like that. It's nothing new but it has allowed us to match up positions for some neat ripple dissolves. We've employed a vast range of techniques to achieve this but didn't need any real motion-control hardware."

Digital enhancement will be used to give the mirror reflections an otherworldliness according to Farino. "We want them to have a more ethereal look than just a plain reflection like a membrane almost as if Claudia's reflection is supposed to be an idealized image of herself. Makeup and costumes helped there too, of course. Efforts were concentrated on softness of makeup and lighting with pale colors in the costumes to make a completely flattering reflection of Sigourney. With certain actions I had to advise her on what to do—laying her hands on the Vanity mirror as opposed to cupping them higher in the frame and therefore crossing the matte line. It was my job to simplify the technical demands on her so it didn't inhibit or interfere with her performance."



“Sigourney’s face makes a great canvas for someone like me,” said Linda Devetta, makeup artist. “She’s never looked more beautiful or more ugly.”

designer Nick Dudman, discovered on *HOUSE OF THE SPIRITS*. Dermplast was also used to age Sally Field in *FOREST GUMP*. Devetta, who divides her time exclusively between Weaver and actor Jeremy Irons, said, “Dermplast resembles cubes of gelatin all with different numbers. You mix certain numbers together for whatever effect you require, melt the combination in

the focus point of view because you are seeing through it rather than the surface. The drawbacks are you have to have a completely balanced atmosphere for it to work properly and you must use mature casts at least a week old. The dry atmosphere in Barrandov Studios hasn’t made it easy. Every makeup artist who uses this stuff swears they’ll never use it again...until the next time! The difference between disaster and success is so minute. Dick Smith hates it!”



a microwave, put it in a negative cast, then set it in the freezer. Number 1 is used to glue it to the actor’s face.”

“The benefits of Dermplast, as opposed to latex rubber which I loathe, is that it’s non-toxic, it stays on through the warmth of the skin and the camera loves it because it’s slightly translucent. Our director of photography on *SNOW WHITE*, Mike Southon, says it’s actually hard to light from

Devetta’s makeup challenge was to make Weaver look radiant in the magic mirror scenes, contrasted to the gruesomeness of her witch design (right).

A duplicate of the antique Vanity was built by the art department to Farino’s specifications. “We had to have a copy of the facade so we could open it up and look through it at any angle,” he said. “The mirror was removable so a blue screen could be easily substituted and there were no draws built into our cabinet just in case they blocked out part of it. We conceived numerous split screens to vary the look of both Sigour-

ney had to look completely unrecognizable as an old hag. Noted Weaver, “I didn’t want to play this predictable wicked witch creature forcing a rosy apple on Lilli. So we concocted this person from ‘The Canterbury Tales;’ hunched over, slightly drunk, with big ears, horrendous teeth and a Breugel face. This was my most favorite part of the film because it was such an amazing transformation. I look like someone from another world yet so familiar at the same time. It’s truly magical.”

For this transformation, Weaver’s long-time personal makeup artist, Linda Devetta, used the Swiss product Dermplast, which she, and prosthetic

Devetta worked from Weaver’s head model made for *ALIEN 3* and refined her hag design at Pinewood Studios during preproduction. “It comprised a bald cap, nose, lower jaw, cheeks and four pieces for the neck,” she said. “Then we had long fingernails and gnarled fingers with age spots and veins put on with food dye rather than standard makeup. We did plan to use contact lenses at one stage but we axed those. Sigourney was uncomfortable enough as it was. The whole process took four hours which isn’t bad considering. I must say Sigourney certainly did the hag makeup justice. As soon as it went on she became the character and was marvellous.”

Devetta has worked with Weaver since *HALF MOON STREET* in 1986 and remarked, “Sigourney has a wonderful face which makes a great canvas for someone like me. Her nose is small, her eyes are in such a fabulous setting that you can paint any picture you want and it will look fantastic. *SNOW WHITE IN THE BLACK FOREST* has been an interesting film for us both to do. Sigourney has never looked more beautiful or more ugly and I’ve had the chance to work on a classic fairytale which has always been my ambition.” □



Weaver on the set in Prague, Czechoslovakia with director Michael Cohn. Left: Fantasy II’s CGI carpet of birds cover Lilli when found in the forest.

ney and her Claudia reflection by shooting her real reflection correctly framed in the mirror, then locking off the camera and shooting the empty room. Simple, clean and effective.”

While such visual effects are tedious and exacting in the extreme for an actress to work on, Sigourney Weaver did enjoy one part of the prosthetic makeup process enormously. For the sequence where she tempts Snow White with a bite of a poisoned apple, Weaver



SPAWN

Best-selling comic book hero from Hell debuts.

By James Van Hise

How would SPAWN's director, Mark Dippé, describe his film to someone who had never read the comic book that it's based on? He thought a moment and then replied, "He's a dead guy that comes back to kick ass. As [comic book creator] Todd [McFarlane] says, 'Spawn makes Batman look like a pussy.' It works at a lot of levels. It's the basic story about a guy who gets involved with things and he doesn't realize how dark they are. He's murdered, and as a consequence his soul goes to this land and he's given a chance to come back to be with the woman he loves. But when he comes back he finds that everything has passed him by and he's screwed, the classic double paradox. It's the story of how he redeems himself in the face of all the

horrors that he's become involved with. That's the basic story of Spawn. Spawn, born of love, twisted by hate. It's got this element that his motivation is his heart, but the realities he faces are very cruel. He's a man damned to Hell who, in the end, will do the right thing regardless of the fact that there's no redemption for his soul. There's no chance." The film, ILM effects expert Dippe's directing debut, opened nationwide August 8.

Producer Clint Goldman sees SPAWN as an outgrowth of the special effects event movie, a genre he feels sprang from James Cameron's THE ABYSS, a film he worked on at ILM with Dippé. Noted Goldman, "That was the breakthrough, the thing that said, 'Hey, if we can do this, we can sell movie tickets,' and so that's really what got it going. Then Jim Cameron did it again with the

Michael Jai White as Spawn in a latex suit by the KNB Efx Group (right). Falling from the ceiling, ILM's CGI Spawn confronts Martin Sheen at the Embassy, pushing the effects envelope.





DIRECTOR MARK DIPPÉ

“His creator Todd McFarlane says, ‘Spawn makes Batman look like a pussy.’ It’s the basic story of a guy involved with things and he doesn’t realize how dark they are.”

T-1000 and Steven Spielberg did it with JURASSIC PARK. Now it’s just a zoo. It’s gone from just a handful of people working in digital filmmaking until it’s everywhere now.”

Dippé and fellow ILM effects hotshots Goldman and Steven “Spaz” Williams, the film’s effects supervisor who worked together on films like THE ABYSS, JURASSIC PARK and TERMINATOR 2, were looking for a project to launch themselves as filmmakers when they met *Spawn* comic book creator Todd McFarlane, who suggested they make SPAWN their debut. “We worked together developing a story and Todd liked what I put together,” said Dippé. “I took it over to New Line and it took a little bit of time for that to be settled, and then I began working with Alan McElroy writing the screenplay, and that took a year or so.” Following the script’s greenlight at New Line were months of pre-production and the creation of conceptual

designs before SPAWN was given the final go-ahead in the Spring of 1996.

Recalled McFarlane, “Mark and Clint were around when we were doing the original pitches to the big studios, more as special effects guys just to show what they’re able to accomplish. But as time went by and I got to know them a little bit better, then we just became more hell-bent on doing this as a team effort. I wanted to see if I couldn’t expand my character, and Clint and Mark wanted to expand their careers, and so essentially we just tied it all together. My contract is tied to them. You don’t get SPAWN unless Mark, Spaz and Clint are connected to this. And if worse comes to worse, at least they get their money even if you decide to boot them. The reason for that for me was that I felt confident that I could turn my back on those guys and I wouldn’t feel that the integrity of the character was being manipulated for some other agenda. Those guys

Malebolgia, the demon who returns murdered agent Al Simmons to Earth as Spawn to exact revenge, in a CGI Hell devised by Santa Barbara Studios.



SPAWN

TODD MCFARLANE

Spawn's creator sticks to his guns at deal time.

By James Van Hise

Hollywood showed an interest in *Spawn* almost from its inception in 1992. A group of disgruntled Marvel Comics artists led by Todd McFarlane, split from Marvel to form Image Comics. *Spawn*, their first effort, became the comics industry's top seller and remains so today. "[Movie offers] came out of the woodwork right when *Spawn* first came out," said McFarlane, the comic's creator. "From there we got down to some serious pitches with all of the studios. I remember that one day we were actually at five of the studios, with the presidents, giving them the pitch. That's the point

The best-selling comic, which had the major Hollywood studios lining up to make a deal with McFarlane.



where they either go thumbs up or thumbs down. They either start bidding on it or they go, 'no, we pass.' Two or three of them came in with bids, but the one that obviously was the most serious was Columbia."

But Columbia insisted on buying all rights to *Spawn*, not just the movie rights; McFarlane wouldn't have even retained the rights to continue doing the comic book.

"That was really the thing that broke it down at Columbia," McFarlane admitted. "They wanted all the ancillary rights in perpetuity and all this crap. I come from a different world; in some respects, in the comic book industry, I'm one of the kings. So I probably had a certain amount of arrogance with me, and I said 'no—I'm just giving you a license to put it on the sixty-foot screen. That's it. You don't get anything else.' It's just silly. When I go make a t-shirt deal they don't want part of the videogame rights. If they had gotten me five or ten years earlier when I was a starving artist it might have been different, but it wasn't important enough for me to basically bend over and take it.

"Because Sony owns Tri-Star and Columbia, one of the things they got hooked up on was the videogame rights. It got bogged down with stupid stuff. Then I ended up later going back to Sony's videogame division after the Columbia deal broke down



McFarlane



Todd McFarlane's *Spawn*, haunting the film's architecture like a gargoyles come to life—definitely the darker side of superheroes.

and their videogame company gave me twice as much just for the videogame as Columbia wanted to give me for all rights combined forever! So I just doubled that number with one item.

"I'm not a money guy, it's just the principle of the fuckin' thing. So don't tell me lies that you can't give me stuff when your company—that was only going to be a fraction of this deal—gave me more than double the whole deal combined. They just assume that because they're going to spend their 40 million bucks that they own you lock, stock and barrel. It wasn't important enough to me to play that game."

After the deal with Columbia fell apart, McFarlane met with Mike DeLuca, the head of New Line Cinema. "He's a comic book fan anyway and that was at the time that Turner had just purchased New Line, so I knew that their budgets were going to go bigger. You try to get as big a budget as you can but I knew that with Turner coming in that he wasn't going to try and play

the small game—he was going to start to infuse some cash in there, which he's done. Their budgets have gone way up from four or five years ago. So we struck the deal with Mike DeLuca and finally got through all the hard points in the contract and we started writing a script. I met with New Line in early '93 and probably signed it either late '93 or early '94, so from signing away the option to the movie is less than three years."

Although McFarlane was free to visit the set as often as he wanted, he only turned up once every couple of weeks because he was busy working on the HBO *SPAWN* animated series [see sidebar page 50]. In describing the animated series, McFarlane stated, "It's *SPAWN* with even more of an edge. The movie is PG-13. The comic book I'd say is PG-13, but the animation is 'R.'

"So for those that think that the comic book and the movie have gone too far—don't turn on this show." □

wanted to do as good of an effort as possible and didn't see it as one of 20 properties they were working on. They've been my eyes and ears during this whole process so I can turn my back on this and don't have to be there every waking moment and I can feel that things are moving along in a direction that's satisfying to me."

And yet, even though SPAWN is the first film that the group has worked together on as a team in these capacities, McFarlane felt that it is precisely because this is their first joint effort that they would put that much more into it to prove that they're ready to advance to the next level of filmmaking. "In terms of actual expertise per se they'd never produced or directed," noted McFarlane. "So it was more of I knew that these guys wanted to make a career and this was going to be their big moment and they would be pouring their heart and soul into this. That Spaz would be in charge of the special effects and some of the production values, and this is their time to shine. In the talks I had with them I could see that they got what this was going to be and the mood that they were going to get and so on some levels it was just as important, if not more important, to them. They had as much to gain or lose as I did."

"But again, they've worked second unit and done special effects on some big movies, so it's not like they were complete novices coming in here. It was just their time to shine and hog a bit of the credit if it worked instead of being down at the bottom of the credits."

While many properties are sold to movies, it is rare that the original creator of that property contributes to the filmmaking process. Filmmakers often tend to feel that outsiders can only interfere. But Dippé respected McFarlane's creative achievements and welcomed his input all along the line, from script development to character design.

"Todd and I talked about it all the time," said Dippé. "I would send him everything and ask for comments. Throughout the entire process I wanted to make sure that Todd saw what was going on and that it met

MARK DIPPÉ

"I got involved in filmmaking by seeking out projects in which I could create things that hadn't been seen before. That's the reason I was drawn to SPAWN—it stood out."



Above: Spawn attacks with a CGI punch courtesy of ILM.
Right: Nicol Williamson as Coglostro, Spawn's mysterious mentor.

with his approval. Todd's very open-minded. He loved the ideas that I had and I think what he's interested in is making a good film, making sure that the essence of Spawn and his world is retained. But he also understands the differences between the various mediums, whether it be a comic book or movie or television. So he was very open to trying things. He's a good friend and I had a great time working with him."



Ian McElroy wrote the first draft and developed it with McFarlane of his involvement, "The process has always been that any time I want to give any input or make any suggestions for changes both Mark [Dippé] and Clint [Goldman] have always had an open door. They don't implement everything I say because that would be a little too one-sided. But for the most part, if I've got a reason behind something or I feel pretty strongly about it and I push hard enough, then they're okay with it."

In adapting SPAWN for the screen, it was decided to tell a

more linear story. To do this they took elements which weren't revealed in the comic book for many months and re-assembled them in the order in which they actually occurred, thereby creating a more straightforward back story for the character, and essentially making the film the tale of Spawn's origin and redemption.

"The comic book starts with him being Spawn and then you start to catch up," explained McFarlane. "The studio thought it would be better to not get too fancy in terms of the storytelling. So we tweaked that and rewrote that and fixed it up for what seemed like a long while. But probably my impatience is based on the fact that I've never really dealt in that world. What seems like a long time to me, a lot of people have said, 'God, that went pretty quick!' So they're kind of amazed that from the time I actually signed a contract to the time we actually put the movie in the can that it's actually a short period compared to a lot of other movies, so I guess I shouldn't bellyache too much."

Dippé and McFarlane met regularly during pre-produc-

tion, such as when effects prototypes were being sculpted at KNB, and when the wardrobe was being designed. McFarlane remained very much in touch with the filmmakers during production, visiting the set every other week and being sent tapes of what had been shot on a regular basis. McFarlane also approved all production designs on the film.

Noted Goldman, "We ran every casting idea by him and he looked at every version of the script, especially towards the end when we were getting



ready for shooting and going over the final dialogue and the final decisions. He brought his little daughter out one day and she's in the birthday party scene. He's really excited that the movie got to be made his way [and not] through one of the major studios."

Goldman stressed the importance of McFarlane's input. "He's part of our team," said the producer. "I don't think of Todd any differently than any other guy who's involved with helping us make the movie. He's really quite brilliant and has had many ideas that really helped make the movie a lot better. It's the little things sometimes that have really helped improve the quality of the movie we're making."

McFarlane had confidence in the SPAWN team he assembled. "The actual making of the show is a slow, tedious process," said McFarlane. "It's not all that exciting to sit there and watch them movie lighting around and spend two and three hours putting on makeup. I was more concerned whether the script is where I want it. Are the costumes like I want? Have we talked about the mood of the

SPAWN

MARK DIPPÉ, DIRECTOR

ILM's T2 effects wizard expands his vision.

By James Van Hise

SPAWN is Mark Dippé's directing debut. He worked previously as a visual effects supervisor for Lucasfilm's Industrial Light & Magic on such movies as *THE ABYSS*, *TERMINATOR 2*, *THE FLINTSTONES*, *JURASSIC PARK* and *CONGO*. "I worked on a lot of movies for ILM for many years. I created computer animated characters for the films and then became a video effects director," said Dippé. "But my specialty, and the reason I was attracted to make films, was to



Former ILM effects ace Dippé makes his feature directing debut in *SPAWN*, after supervising effects on films such as *THE ABYSS* (left).



create characters and images you'd never seen before. That's the reason I was drawn to *SPAWN*. When I saw the style of Todd McFarlane, it very much stood out.

"That's kind of how I got involved in my career in filmmaking. I began seeking out projects in which I could create things that hadn't been seen before, like the water snake in *THE ABYSS*. I was there at the right time. It was a coincidence that I made these choices and sure enough *THE ABYSS* came up and I got to do this great thing and people were really amazed by it. I did a few other films in-between like *RED OCTOBER*, and then *TERMINA-*

TOR 2 came along and I made the liquid metal man. Steve Williams [*SPAWN*'s visual effects supervisor] and myself are the primary designers of all that stuff. I did several other movies after that, and then came *JURASSIC PARK*."

On *JURASSIC PARK* Dippé was the co-visual effects supervisor with Dennis Muren and worked with him on the design of the dinosaur sequences. He worked on the jeep chase with the T-Rex and collaborated with Williams on creating the original T-Rex for *JURASSIC PARK* that sold Spielberg on CGI's capabilities.

"I don't know if you know the *JURASSIC PARK* story, but originally they weren't going to use computer animation. They were going to use stop-motion and full-scale animatronics. But Steve and I said that's a waste of money so we put together a CG dinosaur just out of bones and everyone was impressed by that. Then we got a little crew together and made a dinosaur

with skin and Steven Spielberg said, 'Of course! It's obvious! What the hell are you telling me not to use that CG for?' And that became a very big project as a consequence. But they actually built a number of full-scale animatronic creatures that ultimately were hardly used in the film. It was an interesting experience and it was pretty bold because most of what we'd done up to that point was very abstract. There were no rules. When you're making a liquid metal man there's no one to say what it should look like. But when you're making a dinosaur, even though you don't know what it looked like, there's the corollary of an animal. So it was bold of us to say that we could do it, and it was hard. But it all worked out in the end."

But the desire to create films rather than parts of films burned strong in Dippé. This led to directing commercials for ILM and a music video for Herbie Hancock. Eventually his passion to direct led to *SPAWN*.

"I think I met [comic book

creator] Todd [McFarlane] around issue 3 or 4," Dippé recalled. "Todd was interested in making a feature film from his character. We had been involved with doing a lot of computer animated characters and he heard about our work. We were introduced and hit it off, and that's how it began."

Dippé's effects background came in handy for the on-set shooting which involved mechanical effects, such as the animatronic puppets built for certain scenes involving the appearance of *Spawn*'s nemesis *The Violator*. "It's a very complicated physical process," said Dippé of working with the animatronic *Violator* puppets. "We worked with this kind of stuff quite a bit before and there's only so much you can do with it. You can't expect too much out of it, so for the kinds of things we're doing it's very successful, meaning short bursts of movement. We're not talking about really long shots or walking across the room. You had to use it in those very specific ways. Like anything else I wish things could have gone faster because it's difficult working with something that weighs a thousand pounds and takes six people to work. It's hard to move it. It's hard to put in position. It's hard to change things once you start going. I love these types of films, but actually the process of making them is a hard and painful one. The fun part was putting the slime in the mouth of the *Violator*. It's all gooey and smelly and nasty and horrible, as it should be," Dippé laughed at the thought.

Once the principal photography was completed in November, the full time editing work on *SPAWN* began, and this was



Michael Jai White as Spawn, in KNB's sinister-looking latex fighting suit. Dippé sees the film in terms of a Hollywood event and effects picture.

handled between Dippé and film editor Michael Knue. "It's a calmer process," noted Dippé of the editing. "It's a lot of fun. It's great to be able to sit back and look at a movie come together. When you're shooting you can really only see those pieces that you're doing and there's always difficulties. One thing that's fun about the production process is that a lot of times things are greater than you expected and new things happen that are wonderful. But editing is where the movie comes together and becomes the film and that's a very exciting process. That's another layer at which you can work creatively together.

"Another big part of this film of course is all the visual effects that are involved. A big part of this film is visual effects, as I'm sure everyone expects, and we're seeing all these creatures and characters come to life in ways that you can't do in real life. You can't have Spawn doing these amazing things, and you can't have Violator beating the crap out of somebody in real

life. So it requires these post-production processes."

Dippé noted that he supported the decision to make the film version of SPAWN suitable for a PG-13 audience. "The interesting thing about Spawn," the director observed, "is that I often wonder...a large percentage of the readers are older, but with the toy line, which is a very popular toy line, there are a lot of younger people now who are exposed to the character. It's interesting to me because people that know the book are typically older people like myself, and then I meet little kids who love the toys but don't really know the book. It's an interesting conundrum, but that's just the reality of people who are into Spawn. I think the world of people who know it now is much larger, but still most people don't know about Spawn. It's not nearly as well-known and understood as older comic books like Superman. But for a brand new book it's unbelievable how popular it is. It's amazing that Todd has created such a popular character." □

DIRECTOR MARK DIPPÉ

"I love these types of films, but actually the process of making them is a hard and painful one. The fun part was putting the slime in the mouth of the Violator."

story? Are the characters where they're supposed to be? Have we talked about camera angles, storyboards and all the other things? Well, all the pieces are there—I don't need to stand here and watch them put it together. And given that part of my job is to keep spreading the gospel of SPAWN, too, if I was out on the movie set getting my ego stroked then I'd be doing a disservice to the characters and to those people who are working hard on the movie set."

Dippé realized that some aspects of *Spawn* needed to be changed to turn it into a feature film. The structure of storytelling in motion pictures alone necessitated some alterations in the way SPAWN was presented. "It's a film. It's not the comic book," said Dippé. "There are differences. That's just the reality of making a film, and there are some things we took from the character that work. But I always wanted to stay true to the character. There's no doubt about it. I love the character. I think it's one of the more dynamic and brilliant characters in comic books, period. I wanted to maintain Todd's concept and creation from the beginning. But there are also things in the film that the Spawn neophyte will not appreciate whereas the Spawn fan will. The world of Spawn is a very complicated and large one. You can't really include it all. You can make a movie based on two issues whereas the world of Spawn has branched out into all these sub-stories and ideas."

Because *Spawn* is such a high profile comic book, people who ordinarily don't follow the comic book realm that closely had still heard of SPAWN and were intrigued with being involved in the production.

"We had a good story and a lot of interesting designs that attracted people," said Dippé. "Some of the actors had kids

who were fans, Martin Sheen in particular. I think that people are attracted to the story itself and what the film is about. The storyline works at a lot of levels. In some sense it's a very classic story about man's struggle with himself. Life is cruel. We don't always make the right choice, and because we don't necessarily commit ourselves to good and we sort of wade in the evil that exists in the world we can be dragged down into it. There are lots of these ideas in the book and so in the script those ideas come through. It's an interesting story with interesting characters. I think that the opportunity to play Spawn and Clown were obviously very attractive to actors because they are very different but very powerful characters. There's a lot of room there in terms of the range of the characters. That's basically what attracted them. The story. The script. The possibilities. It's a very unusual world and people believed in the picture."

But casting the right actors

Miko Hughes (PET SEMATARY) stars as Zack Webb, Spawn's friend, targeting a younger PG-13 audience.



was just the beginning because Michael Jai White as Spawn, and John Leguizamo as Clown, really had their work cut out for them because of the complicated prosthetics these actors had to work under.

"It was deadly," Dippé admitted. "Both John and Michael Jai wore full body prosthetics 12 hours a day, and it takes two-and-a-half hours to put it on so they've got to be there at four or five a.m. It's extremely physically demanding. People don't realize, it's like running a marathon. You sweat ten gallons a day and you go home and you're exhausted. You go to sleep, you rest, you wake up and your muscles ache. So the actors have to put an extraordinary amount of energy and heart into it to keep the characters alive."

Although both the characters of Spawn and Clown had to be created with elaborate prosthetic work, John Leguizamo also had to contort his body in order to make Clown appear to be shorter than the actor actually is. "John was amazing," Dippé insisted with great admiration. "He had to wear this gigantic suit. He's actually 5'8". He had to be five feet tall whenever we were shooting and he physically had to deal with that. There'd be times he'd be doing long takes and he'd be walking around in this hunched over way with this

John Leguizamo as Clown, the manic comic presence energizing the action. The 5'8" actor worked at appearing 5'.



SPAWN

MICHAEL JAI WHITE, SUPER ACTOR

Physical and mental fitness was essential to play Spawn.

By James Van Hise

Cast in the lead role of SPAWN himself is Michael Jai White (who recently appeared in the lead role of TYSON on HBO). Although seen early in the film as his human character, Al Simmons, after he is killed, sent to Hell and returned to Earth as Spawn, White is forever in costume and makeup.

White, a trained martial artist, also found it necessary to do a lot of the physical action himself because the way he moves is very recognizable and would be difficult for a stuntman to imitate. "What I tried to do is create a movement style for the character," he said. "I didn't want to move like a man in a suit. Because of my years in the martial arts, it became difficult for stuntmen to imitate the same thing. They would try to have a stunt man do some of the movement and call me back in to actually perform it myself because you can see a difference."

But what White really enjoyed was working with fellow performers like Martin Sheen and John Leguizamo. "It was great," he said. "Martin Sheen has had such an impact on me. He's a great guy and a great actor. He's been an inspiration. I didn't know he was as funny as he is. The guy's hilarious. He can go into impressions and he almost turns into Robin Williams in the blink of an eye. He makes transitions from one character to another and he really approaches his job with the enthusiasm of a beginner. Like



White as agent Al Simmons, before he is killed and sent to Hell to become Spawn.

he's as fresh as his first job. It's hard to believe that this guy has been around and has done the work that he has with such a positive attitude—not jaded at all. He's just so alive! It's a pleasure working with that guy.

"I remember Martin Sheen came up with a really funny line, and I wish they'd used it in the film. I'm working with a group called the A-6 and we're like Black Ops people, assassins. There's this scene between Martin Sheen and me where I announce that I'm quitting and Martin Sheen came up with a retort. He says, 'You can't quit us, Al. We're not the United States Post Office, although we're getting there.' I thought that was hilarious. I argued to keep that line in the scene, but I guess it's not fair to the Post Of-

fice. They've got enough flak from all those occurrences."

White also praised Leguizamo for his spontaneity and creativity. "Working off of him was really gratifying," said White. "John had this costume that made him look like he's 350 pounds. In fact his prosthetic makeup took longer than mine. It was kind of rough on him because he would break out. His skin wasn't holding up after a while and it made me count my blessings. I had mild skin irritations, but when I saw John, John looked like a constellation sometimes."

Besides his human co-stars, White also had to act opposite the animatronic puppets built to represent The Violator for specific scenes filmed on set which would later be amplified with computer-generated imaging. But White liked the unusual challenge of acting opposite an inanimate object.

"It was a lot of fun," he insisted. "I really enjoyed doing the pantomime with a mechanical creature. I love all that type of physical acting, so I really got a kick out of it. I was fascinated by all the inner workings of the creature."

In order to become Spawn, White had to go through the sometimes grueling process necessary to construct a costume which fits perfectly. That meant sitting still so that the guys from KNB could make a full body cast of him. "They cast my feet separately and then my legs so that even the wet suit

MICHAEL JAI WHITE

“There was one day I thought I was losing my mind. What started working on me was the desire to be free and feel the air on my own flesh. I worked on meditation.”



White in full prosthetics by KNB Efx has Violator breathing down his neck. The actor's real challenge was to overcome the claustrophobia created by the suit.

that I wear underneath the costume is tailored to fit my form. They also took head casts—the entire body.”

Because such costumes are constructed to be so perfectly form fitting, this can lead to the inevitable shrinkage problems, as was rumored to be the case with Alicia Silverstone in *BATMAN & ROBIN* earlier this summer. As White explained, in his case this wasn't the problem it might have been. “They make it shrink a little, but I have an extensive knowledge of nutrition, weight control and exercise and what I would do is if it were tight I could manipulate my water and my sodium intake to shed three pounds within a day or so, and the fact that I'm

sweating so much, it was more of an effort to stay the same size to fill the costume out.

Although actors who wear these kinds of full body costumes often employ cool suits to prevent them from overheating, Michael Jai White decided that in his case it would be better if he didn't go that route. “The cool suits have pluses and minuses with them. For the majority of the filming time I would not wear them. The cool suit is just around the chest and back area. It's like a vest. It's not covering your whole body, and the abrupt temperature change made it a bit irritating and made me worry. Being an athlete I know that you should cool down slowly, so I resisted

using the cool suit because my mind is on completing the project healthy. I knew that if I had to do a scene and I was sick that it would plague me for the rest of my life because I would always wish that I could have done it over.

“So what I found myself doing throughout the whole picture is that even at times when I was energetic earlier in the day, I would purposely relax and stay in a calm state, almost like an hypnotic state just to preserve my energy for the sake of the film. Every minute that I'm sweating I could deplete my energy and I knew that if I didn't have that reserve for the later hours that my performance would suffer. I'm very tough on myself and I'm hell to pay.

“It was kind of a Catch-22. In one way I'd want to free my mind and act like everything's fine and go about my day normally so that I would overcome the claustrophobia of the prosthetics. But on the other hand, if I did that I could possibly deplete my system. So I had to struggle to just stay sedentary between takes. There were a few days where I just made it, because I'd be sweating throughout the day and then I might have to run across a beam 70 feet in the air, and I never knew when I might wind up having to do a scene like that.”

The panic of claustrophobia hit White only once. “There was one day I thought that I was losing my mind. What started working on me was the desire to be free and to feel the air on my own flesh. When I'm in full Spawn costume, the only part of my body that's exposed are my eyelashes because I'm wearing contacts that cover my entire eye. So it became a mental exercise, and I tend to try to turn any type of adversity into a positive. What I would then do is work on meditation and it would take my mind out of the

situation so that I would be able to concentrate in later scenes in the tenth, eleventh and twelfth hours.

“I was always active no matter what I was doing because if I'm just sitting around, sweat is pouring out of me. Even in hours of waiting I've got glue and prosthetics stuck on me. But after awhile you get a little more used to it and eventually I did. It was kind of unique in that with the prosthetic makeup I still had to emote. Usually with prosthetics if you're a monster you're a monster, but the anger is only a portion of this character. The producers and director along with myself knew that it was going to be a bit of a first, that we'd be breaking ground with some new experiences because I didn't know how my health would hold up with irritations and what have you. But really, it came off without a hitch.” □

Spawn attacks! White's martial arts skill made him adept at action scenes.



Makeup Hell: White undergoes the arduous prosthetics application of his burn makeup which is concealed by Spawn's face mask.



weird makeup and suit covering him up and he'd have to do something that's very physical, like walking up stairs, doing this brutal comic routine and he would just fall down at the end because he'd be too tired, so we'd say, 'Cut.'

"It was really brutal and Michael Jai had similar problems. They both knew what they were getting into but it's like you just do it for a day and you realize it's tough. We had all the latest technology so if they got too hot they could be hooked up to a cooling system. But that only does so much. It's just uncomfortable. Just imagine that you're inside a plastic baggie and your sweat stays in there or it gets all gooey and damp and whether it's hot or cold it's uncomfortable."

SPAWN had a 60-day shooting schedule which lasted from August through November in and around Los Angeles. They knew the schedule would be long right from the start because they'd be shooting people in prosthetic makeup, animatronic puppets, claustrophobic sets and the kind of physical production difficulties that required that kind of time.

"It wasn't too much time by any means for this kind of picture," Dippé pointed out, "but it's enough time. It would have

Spawn swings into action courtesy of actor Michael Jai White's athletic ability.



SPAWN

COMPUTER GRAPHICS EFFECTS BY ILM

Chris Kubsch and Steven Williams on visualizing a comic book world.

By James Van Hise

ILM completed 56 effects shots for SPAWN, ranging from digital enhancement of Spawn's mask as it covers and uncovers his face, to full 3-D CGI renderings of both Spawn and his giant adversary, Violator. ILM's Chris Kubsch supervised filming the shots on the set which ILM would enhance later, and acted as the main liaison between ILM's production unit and the first unit. Even while principal photography was underway a crew at ILM built computer graphics models and prepared for the delivery of the live action background plates being filmed. Kubsch was on the set to insure that the shots were what ILM needed to deliver their effects.

As Kubsch explained, it's a more complicated process now than it used to be. "The visual effects used to be more of a post-production effort but nowadays, especially like in this movie where we have a full character in 3-D animation interacting with actors in the live action environment, we need to be here during production to make sure that those so-called plates work out the way that they need to work out for adding the 3-D characters later on. There's a live action representation of Spawn in the movie but in certain sequences there'll be a 3-D generated Spawn that plays in some of the action sequences."

One of the Embassy scenes that Kubsch had to carefully supervise at the Natural History



Steven "Spaz" Williams, the film's visual effects supervisor, worked on such groundbreaking effects efforts as THE ABYSS and JURASSIC PARK.

Museum involved an elaborate skylight which Spawn crashes through into the Embassy Ballroom. "There's a beautiful mosaic glass dome which we obviously couldn't break for this sequence, but in the movie Spawn's actually going to come crashing through that dome and land in the center of the rotunda. Because we could not do it practically for a variety of reasons, that entire shot is going to be a computer graphics shot. We film the background plate [on location], the camera following the motion as if Spawn was there coming down and then later on we're going to recreate the mosaic glass dome in CG, break it in CG, and then have a CG Spawn coming through it, his cape unfolding right in the middle of the rotunda."

Other computer graphic imaging shots include special functions of Spawn's armor such as chains and spikes which the

character can mentally control. One of the sequences filmed in the Embassy rotunda has chains come out and attach to some of the outside parts of the set. Those chains will be added with computer graphics to the live action Spawn filmed on location. Another odd CGI effect will be added to a fight scene which is filmed in the Embassy sequence involving Spawn and a female agent named Priest, played by Melinda Clarke.

Kubsch described the scene, both as it was filmed in live action and how it will be enhanced by ILM. "Spawn is upstairs and Priest attacks him. His armor has a skull piece on his crotch, and in that sequence the skull piece is going to come out and bite Priest on the leg and pull her back. That's obviously a combination between live action Spawn and Priest, and the computer graphics we're going to add with the



ILM's 3-D CGI rendering of Violator, Spawn's giant nemesis, one of 56 effects shots ILM realized. Williams (r) directs Spawn and KNB Efx on-set Violator for a sequence requiring ILM's CGI enhancement, right.

skull piece coming out of his armor and biting her on the leg. It's a fun setup, and an unusual one."

Another live action scene which ILM enhanced involved a chase scene with a truck in which Spawn is on a motorcycle. Noted Kubsch, "The truck's about to hit Spawn on the motorbike and because his cape has the ability to transform himself and objects around him, he transforms the motorbike into something else. That will be a combination between live action of the actual actor on the bike, and then computer graphics of the cape transforming the bike and himself into an armored bike which can withstand an impact when it hits the truck."

But the most ambitious CGI will involve the confrontations between Spawn and Violator. "That'll be one of the most challenging for us in terms of

having two computer-generated characters in some of those shots fighting one another. But they'll be in a live action environment in the set that's being built on the stage. We shoot the background plates live action with the first unit, and in some of the scenes the live action Spawn will actually be in there, but the creature will be a mixture between practical pieces, animatronic pieces of the Violator, and computer graphics elements."

Even though a lot of special effects appear on screen in SPAWN, Kubsch doesn't feel that any of them are superfluous or are being done just for the sake of adding more CGI for its own sake. "Obviously, because the producer and the director of this movie come from a visual effects background it could also lead to the other end of the spectrum, but they are really us-

STEVEN "SPAZ" WILLIAMS
"SPAWN is unique in the sense that we finally get to design our own movie and do what we want with our characters as opposed to acting at the whims of another director."

ing computer graphics only for things that you cannot achieve in live action. [The effects are] fantastic kinds of effects that can't happen in live action because it's impossible to rig something like that, such as for the transformation of Spawn's armor. When you see those

the outside of the building, which is very difficult to rig to begin with, but they did it live because even though it's pushing the limits, you can do it. And it's only for the very close-up scenes in which you see spikes growing out of his hands, which you can't practically do effectively, that we come in and cover that with computer graphics.

"To give you another example, after he climbs up that wall, Spawn falls backwards and his cape comes out and he flies off. To rig that would be extremely dangerous. You'd have to have a high fall involved and you would have to cut away and have a sep-



arate shot whereas that's a shot we'll be doing in CG because it's safer and we can follow through all the way from the cape coming out and flying all in one shot. So that's why it makes a lot of sense to do it that way." Other CGI shots ILM is doing include a scene at the beginning of the film where handheld missiles are fired in an airport assassination.

Kubsch has known the main filmmakers behind SPAWN from the time they all worked together at ILM. "The way we all met—that's [producer] Clint things in close-up you don't want to have it interrupted. You want to have a complete shot without a cutaway, and that's the kind of stuff that we're focusing on." "I can't think of a single shot that we're doing at ILM that you could do practically. So anything that can be practically done is actually practically done with very extensive rigs on set. A few weeks ago we were on the outside of the Fine Arts building in downtown L.A. They had a very elaborate rig of the stunt of Spawn driving up

separate shot whereas that's a shot we'll be doing in CG because it's safer and we can follow through all the way from the cape coming out and flying all in one shot. So that's why it makes a lot of sense to do it that way." Other CGI shots ILM is doing include a scene at the beginning of the film where handheld missiles are fired in an airport assassination.

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Spawn's grand entrance at the embassy as he comes crashing through the Embassy skylight, his CGI cape billowing.



ILM rendered the skylight as well as Spawn and his cape as full CGI models. Chris Kubsch was on set to supervise shots.

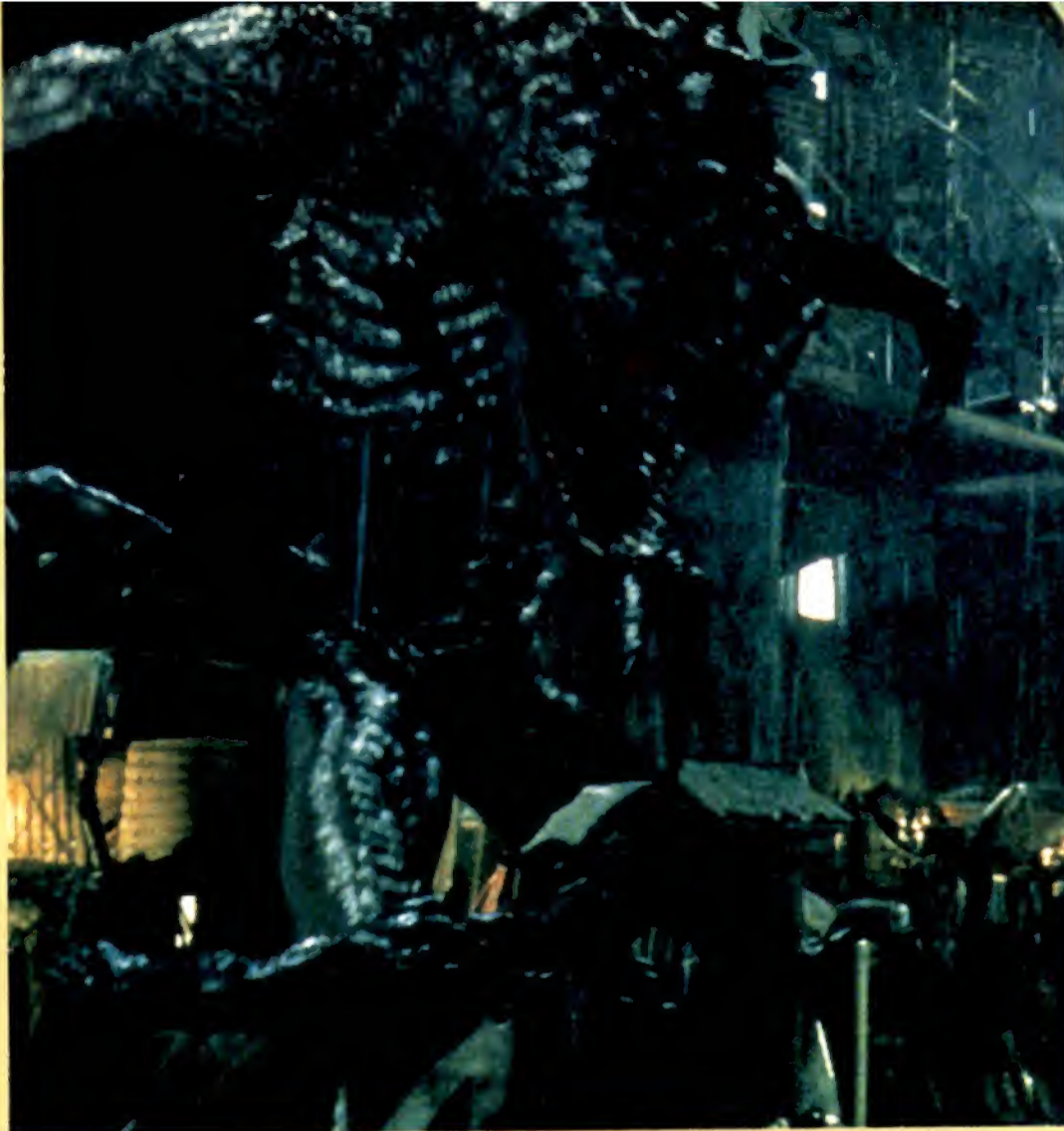


Goldman, [director] Mark Dippe' and myself—I was up at ILM working on THE MASK. Steve Williams, who's the visual effects supervisor on this film, also worked on it."

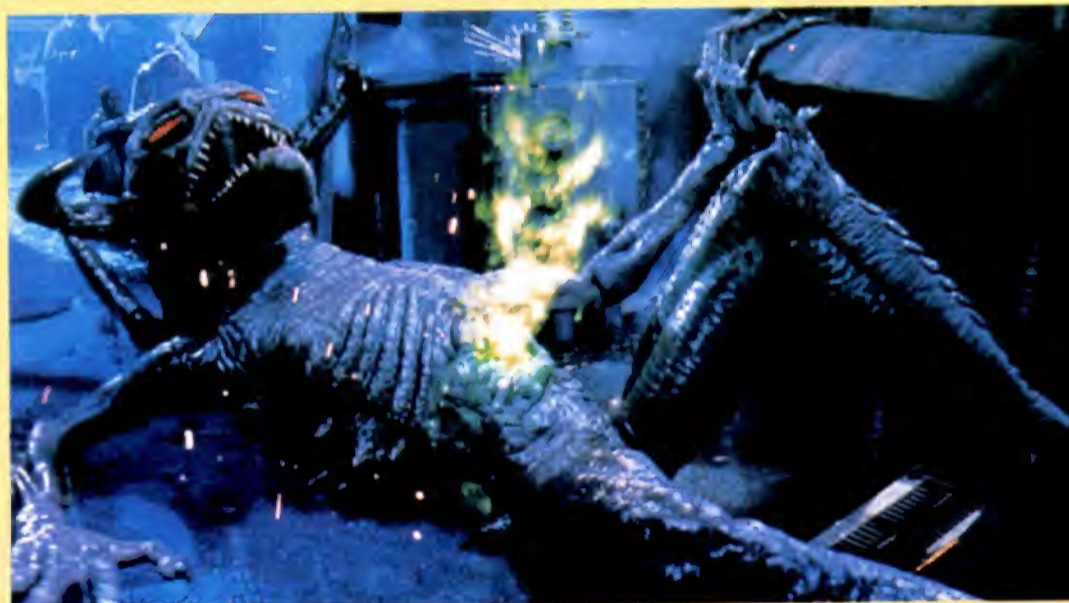
Steve "Spaz" Williams (his nickname is one he chose for himself, based on the character in the first MEATBALLS film) still works at ILM. He's the animation director and second unit director on SPAWN and is involved in any scene in the film which involves special effects. "Whenever things can't be done in the real world," Williams stated.

Williams originally came to work at ILM as a consultant. "I worked at a company called Alias Research from the day it was founded. I helped found some of that technology. It's a three-dimensional animation system that basically has been responsible for all of these effects movies that you've seen in the last nine years. I was brought in originally for two weeks to help them out with a problem. Then they asked me to stick around to animate the pseudopod [in THE ABYSS], which is where Mark [Dippe'] and I met and shared the same office and got into a lot of trouble and were suspended three times from ILM. It's a great place and they certainly have the latitude, but they have a lot of restrictions. Basically when guys like Mark and I broke the rules we'd get our hands smacked. But I really like it here. It's mutually admirable that we look for the next thing to do, and the next thing for us to do is to make our own movie. So it worked out.

"Mark and I were partners here at ILM when we both joined it in '88, and we've been partners since the pseudopod for THE ABYSS. That was our first collaboration. The next thing we did was TERMINATOR 2, and then JURASSIC PARK. In my case, I was responsible for building and animating the T-Rex, so I invented a technology that we still follow here now. The dragon



ILM's CGI Violator attacks Spawn in an alley, one of the film's most ambitious effects sequences, requiring both characters to be rendered by ILM as CGI models.



[from DRAGONHEART] was built the same way I built the Rex, and the same way I built the T-1000. The T-1000 actually appeared in JURASSIC as the guy who bought it off the toilet seat. I just put shorts and new shoes on him. And after JURASSIC, Mark did THE FLINTSTONES and I did THE MASK."

While SPAWN was in pre-production and the script was being refined, Williams built and animated the new Jaba the Hutt for the STAR WARS rerelease. "That was my little baby," Williams said proudly. "I worked directly with George Lucas on that. That started in August of '94 and I just put Jaba in the can a year ago."

Williams is involved on SPAWN in areas beyond effects, including the editing. He claimed to have shot almost half the movie as second unit director, including sequences that didn't necessarily require effects. The SPAWN production company shot film on three different stages at once and director Mark Dippe was shooting as much as he could, as was Williams, who is also a DGA director.

Williams referred to it as "wearing a couple hats, which is the way I like it as opposed to standing on high with a light pen and saying, 'Do this. Do that.' I like to get in and do it myself. I filmed a lot of that stuff. I filmed the exploding

truck. I set all that up. In some cases I had to do makeup shots for Mark. But we did very well on our shooting schedule and came in a day under."

Williams filmed all of the background plates that will have the Violator in them and when he finally returned to ILM he had another sixty shots to supervise the completion of there.

"I've designed all those shots with all the effects in them," said Williams. "That's principally what my position has been on SPAWN. Plus Mark, Clint and I are all partners on this movie so we're all designing the edits and the story, and this has been going on for a few years. I've been an employee of ILM for nine years, but now I'm a client for the first time."

Williams credited Habib Zargarpour and Christophe Hery for supervising all the technical aspects at ILM. Dennis Turner acted as ILM's animation supervisor on SPAWN. "These guys are the kingpins," said Williams. "I'm classified as the visual effects supervisor so I oversee the entire thing."

While many artists and technicians are needed to physically create a CGI shot, the computer graphics division of ILM has a full-time staff of 20 at any given time. "But there are other support services that you purchase when you hire ILM," said Williams. "Basically the show will probably touch a hundred different hands at ILM. It's very time-consuming. But I've been chief animator here for nine years and have personally built and animated movies like TERMINATOR 2 and JURASSIC PARK, so I'm familiar with the pipeline to the point where I can actually do shots myself. That's why it works a little better.

"But SPAWN is unique," Williams pointed out, "in the sense that we finally get to design our own movie and do what we want with our characters as opposed to acting at the whims of another director." □

been a whole different story if we tried to shoot in something like 40 days. It would have been a whole different ballgame. We needed those 60 days."

SPAWN was shot at a number of different studios around L.A., including Raleigh Studios. The shoot-out at the embassy was filmed at the Los Angeles Museum of Natural History. The shifting production base was due to the fact that so many productions were filming in Los Angeles at the same time that sound stage space was extremely limited. Even getting crew members was a competitive situation.

SPAWN required the contributions of several different special effects houses due to the short post-production schedule of the film. In describing the various effects units who are working on SPAWN, Goldman noted, "Industrial Light & Magic is doing about 70 visual effects shots which are for the most part computer-generated characters, either Violator or Spawn. Usually it's when the characters are doing something extraordinary, like when Clown is transforming into Violator or Spawn is sprouting wings and flying, or when Spawn's suit is transforming or his chains are coming out.

"Then we're using a company called Banned From the Ranch Entertainment—they're providing all of the video display work and doing some of the other simpler computer graphics in the movie. They're doing some virtual reality heads-up displays. When there are energy blasts or when Spawn's wounds are healing. That amounts to 30 or 40 shots.

"And then finally we have this Virtual Hell sequence. We're going to render Hell in the movie, which is a two-minute sequence that will have a battle between Cogliostro, Violator and Spawn, and that's being done by the Santa Barbara Studios, which is a very significant part. Spawn goes to Hell twice, once in the beginning of the movie and once with this two-minute sequence at the end. So we're going to create our own version of Hell."

Banned From The Ranch, certainly one of the more un-

SPAWN

THERESA RANDLE, INAMORATA

New to fantasy films, the actress finds the work frightful and fun.

By James Van Hise

Theresa Randle plays Wanda, the woman Spawn loved when he was still a human being, and whom he still yearns to be with even though she married someone else after Al Simmons was assassinated.

Randle had never worked on any sort of science fiction or fantasy film before. "I remember the first day I saw Michael Jai White in his Spawn makeup, when he's burnt up after being stuck in Purgatory. That was a scary day for me because I had no idea what to expect and when I saw him it freaked me out."

Unlike Michael Jai White, Randle was unfamiliar with the character of Spawn before being hired to play the role of Wanda. "I'm not a big fan of comic books," she said. "When I read the script I was intrigued that it had been in circulation for a few years. I ran to the comic book store and did my homework to catch up. I was actually intrigued by it because there's so much that's going on and so many characters within the Spawn family. I loved the script. I went through an extensive auditioning process and was hired. It took a couple months for me to get the final yea. I then worked on the film off and on for 14 weeks." On the set Randle met Spawn's



Martin Sheen and Violator hold Theresa Randle hostage. Randle appears as Spawn's lost love, Wanda, whom he yearns to be with again.

creator, Todd McFarlane, and his daughter Cyan, the namesake for Randle's daughter in the film.

Randle said she relished her scenes opposite Martin Sheen. "Just being in Martin Sheen's presence was a hoot. My scenes with him were of the bad guy snatching and pulling me and my little girl around. I had a lot of fun. I respect his work."

Randle also has one scene with Nicol Williamson [Cogliostro], part of a fight scene largely done with special

effects. "He actually saves my life, but he's not really dealing with me because he's fighting with the Violator, so it's not like we have any scenes where we interact with one another."

The character of Wanda gets dragged into the conflict when Clown decides to use her to torment Spawn. "Wanda's body is taken over by Clown," she said. "I had to be possessed with his spirit. This led to the only scene in the film where she required some special makeup work, although nothing as elaborate as what Michael Jai White required. "Basically it's just a lens change for my eyes," she said. "I had to be fitted for special contact lenses. I had to transform into Clown so therefore I had to have Clown eyes. But I didn't have any prosthetics."

For the scene Randle had to act like Clown and imitate the mannerisms established for the character by John Leguizamo. "Basically it's just a matter of reviewing some of the footage on John Leguizamo's character Clown and then doing my interpretation of Clown being Wanda, so it's just studying some of his vocal qualities and all that good stuff. But I will never be Clown. It's actually just Wanda transformed, so I'm still in my feminine form. But it's acting, so I had to create." □

usual banners for an effects company, had ties to the SPAWN team from their days at ILM. Noted company partner Van Ling, "The name Banned From The Ranch came from the fact that Mark [Dippé] and Spaz [Williams] were banned from Skywalker Ranch during their tenure at ILM for trespassing into George [Lucas]'s office. George was really angry about it and wanted to fire them. But because they were the computer graphics supervisor and animation supervisor for TERMINATOR 2 at the time, they couldn't



really get rid of them because they were obviously too valuable to the show. So they were put on probation and were banned from any of the screenings or dinners or anything like that at the ranch for a year."

It was Ling's partner, Casey Cannon, who worked with Dippé and Williams at ILM at the time, who chose the name. Said Ling, "Casey thought that was so funny, the concept of being banned from the ranch, that she said if we ever start a company we're going to have to call it that. Obviously it hasn't had a particularly deleterious effect on their careers because Spaz was hand-picked by George to do the STAR WARS Special Edition. Mark has been working at ILM and they went on to do JURASSIC PARK and Mark is now directing. We do our best not to associate ourselves with the Ranch out of respect both for Skywalker and George and also because we're trying to establish ourselves and not ride on the coattails of anybody else."

It was Tom Peitzman's job as special effects producer to coordinate all of the special effects scenes going into the \$40 million production, which is really

CHRIS KUBSCH, ILM LIAISON

"I can't think of a single shot that we're doing at ILM that you could do practically. It's only for very close-up scenes that we come in and cover with computer."



Setting up the shot of Melinda Clarke's fall from the Embassy balcony as Priest, Spawn's fellow agent. Left: Spawn blasts Priest and exacts revenge.

driven by the special effects. Peitzman, who previously worked on such films as CONGO and THE RELIC, noted, "I really think the visual effects of this movie are what will help sell to the audience what Spawn is all about."

Besides the liaison between the visual effects companies—ILM, Banned From The Ranch, and the Santa Barbara Studios, Peitzman also coordinates the efforts of the mechanical effects department and the suit department. "I'm the interface, making sure all of the right elements are being delivered at the right time and also making sure that we have all of the pieces put together so that we can complete all of the shots that we need."

Peitzman also coordinated the on-set makeup effects and mechanical effects being done by the KNB Efx Group, who built the Spawn suits and the mechanical versions of The Violator, a 13-foot-tall animatronic puppet.

"The reason they built Violator so big is that they wanted it to be as though he, Violator, totally oversized and overpowers

Spawn," said Peitzman. "They want him to look much bigger than Spawn, so it's clearly not a guy in a suit. We want it to look bigger than life so when Violator takes hold of Spawn and picks him up and throws him up against the wall, it looks like Spawn's a rag doll. It doesn't take a whole lot of effort for Violator to do this."

KNB's full-scale Violator had rod-puppeted legs, with the majority of the body, the torso, on a piston-driven mechanism that provided the up-and-down movement, able to bend at the waist. It can rotate its head to the side 90 degrees each way. It has full facial articulation, brow movement, and jaw movement. The hands are fully articulated.

KNB's makeup designs for the film's title character went through four stages. Noted KNB supervisor Rob Kurtzman, "The first one is when he's Al Simmons. The second one is burned Simmons where he comes back and you see that his chest and his hands and his head are all burned up. It takes about two hours. His third stage is the Spawn suit with the burn head—that makeup takes about an hour

and putting him in the suit takes about 15 minutes. And then the last stage is full Spawn, with the helmet, or the beetle-head as we call it, and the full suit and that takes about 15 minutes to get ready. It's pretty quick. We refined it pretty fast."

The Spawn costume consisted of several different pieces which the actor can quickly slip on. There are boots, hand pieces, and then the suit itself which is a one-piece costume with a zipper up the back and then a blender piece that goes over to hide the zipper. The head is done with makeup. The suit is foam latex and the spikes are Urethane. KNB made a cast of Michael Jai White's whole body and sculpted all of the various pieces of the full suit on that cast. They then died it black and just airbrushed on all of the colors that were added, such as the white striping.

"There's a lot of little pieces to his suit," said Kurtzman. "When it's going to be shot we spritz him down, which gives the suit a sheen. There's a bunch of things for the Spawn suit that were built with various weapons that pop out with blades, and his hands morph into claw hands so that he can climb up the side of buildings. So there are different versions of his hands. He has chains that erupt out of the skulls that are on his chest. Those are like grappling hooks. His belt has the same thing. His belt comes off and it actually forms into a grappling hook that's mechanical and it grabs on to the Violator and wraps around the Violator's neck and eventually it cuts the Violator's head off with the chains."

The ten Spawn suits which were made were built to be quite durable. Some of them were built to be stunt suits while others are made only to be worn by Michael Jai White. Also there are three different versions of the suit. There's a smooth suit and then there's the detailed one with the organic look, and a suit that has spikes sticking out of it, which is Spawn's battle suit. Morphing effects and CGI are used to enhance the effect of having the spikes appear to actually be growing out of the suit.

Although Michael Jai White

SPAWN

FEMME FATALE ASSASSIN

Melinda Clarke plays the classic bad guy, in vinyl.

By James Van Hise

A key supporting role in SPAWN, that of Jessica Priest, is played by Melinda Clarke. Genre fans will remember Clarke from RETURN OF THE LIVING DEAD 3 as well as most recently appearing as Velasca in the two XENA episodes "The Quest" and "A Necessary Evil." She also played a half-human hybrid in the recent season finale of SLIDER. She can currently be seen in the new syndicated TV series SOLDIER OF FORTUNE. In SPAWN she once again plays a vicious protagonist.

Clarke described her own role in SPAWN by stating, "Al Simmons was the number one assassin in the organization, and I play the number two assassin. He wants out but we're not gonna let him out, so we kill him. He goes to Hell because of everything he's done and he gets a second chance. But I play a classic bad guy, in vinyl.

"It's not a large role. I'm in about six scenes with a few lines in each scene. I die, I think, on page 45. And then they put me in cryogenics, I guess, for the sequel, if there is one.

"I'm more the vampy female presence in the movie. My character was written for the film. There was no Jessica Priest in the comic book. Originally the character's name was Chapel, which is a male character who has his own comic book. So staying within that religious motif they went from Chapel to Priest.

"I think they wanted the presence of a very strong female, a bad guy, with very vampy costumes and someone to play off Martin Sheen's character. It's a very sexy part with very few words. She's a character who's very strong and who uses her femininity as her power. Most of my scenes are with Martin Sheen and Michael Jai White. I'm more of a presence,

and it's a good part for me. It's a nice, little supporting role."

Since Priest is an assassin, she carries a big gun—two of them in fact. But they didn't always work: "They had M-16s that they modified to look futuristic, and I shot two at the same time, which is somewhat unrealistic, but for a comic book movie it looks good. But they kept misfiring. Guns that fire blanks have a tendency to do that more often than guns firing real ammunition. The shell gets stuck in the chamber. It's very complicated. The M-16 uses gas to propel its loading mechanism, and when you're firing an M-16 you're supposed to have a brace for it. I was holding them out in the air. So that's one of the reasons they misfired, because they didn't have a brace."

The scenes featuring Priest in SPAWN are memorable, particularly her spectacular death scene where she's shot, crashes backwards through a balcony railing and impacts on a buffet table in the middle of a foreign embassy dinner. Although the hard stuff was done by a stunt person, the first part of the stunt was done by Clarke herself.

"I did a bit of a stunt where they yank me back off the balcony and then I had a double who actually falls to my death. It was very high up, so needless to say I wasn't jumping

Jessica Priest—Spawn's bitter enemy—outfitted for a hit. The character, which doesn't appear in the comic book, is a vampy, evil female presence.



Melinda Clarke as Priest, a fellow spy/assassin at the agency that Al Simmons wants out of before becoming Spawn.

up and down to do it. But these stunt guys are so safe, and so professional. They took out the balcony and set it up with balsa wood and an aluminum railing. They put a harness on me and when Spawn throws me to the ground and picks up a weapon, I say to him, 'You don't have the guts,' and he shoots me and blows me through the balcony. I did that a couple times and they yanked me back and I landed on a couple pads. As an actress it's always exciting, and it's never really a big deal afterwards, but up until the moment it's somewhat daunting. But that's why they have stunt people, so we don't have to always do those things. That balcony was about 16 feet in the air, but I only actually fell about 5 or 6 feet. They had hoisted the pads up on some sort of hydraulic lift so that they were just out of the camera frame, and so I landed about 8 feet up in the air.

"The stunt girl actually had to drop about 12 feet. She landed on a table, and then Clown walks up and makes fun of me. I'm dead at that point and I think he refers to me as a human taco. That's something that I think John [Leguizamo] came up with. He's always coming up with very humorous lines." □

SPAWN

JOHN LEGUIZAMO ON CLOWN

*Being funny, sick
and dark with gusto.*

By James Van Hise

Mark Dippé, the director of SPAWN, boasted of his lead villain, "John Leguizamo, in creative abilities, is at least as good as Jim Carrey. Clown is so bizarre. He can do a wealth of things."

But who is Clown, really? As Leguizamo puts it, "Clown's a little Faustian character who tries to befriend Spawn, but obviously he's lying. He's just trying to use his friendship to get him to lead the armies of Armageddon. He's got a little Jack Nicholson in him, that's for sure, so he gets some demonic pleasure in being evil. And he's definitely a ham. He's comical. I tried to make him clownish,

like if you could have Danny DeVito in there, but crazed."

Leguizamo, who has carved out distinctive characters in films as disparate as ROMEO AND JULIET and THE PEST, is all but unrecognizable as Clown, encased in a prosthetic fat suit crafted by KNB Efx. The makeup allows just enough of the actor's face to show so that he can contribute to the character and not be hidden like THE ELEPHANT MAN. Excessive sweating necessitated that five different Clown suits be readily available. "Steam would come out!" exclaimed Leguizamo. "And then of course everybody walks up to you all day long and says, 'It must be really hot in that, huh? That head must be really tight. I'd get claustrophobic if I was in there. I don't know if I could take that,' and I'd yell, 'Shut up! Leave me alone!'"

The actor had been aware of

Undergoing the arduous makeup process. As one of the SUPER MARIO BROS (inset) with Bob Hoskins.



Spawn (Michael Jai White) encounters a homeless man, a cameo by comic book creator and executive producer Todd McFarlane.

chose not to take advantage of having a cool suit worn underneath his heavy costume, John Leguizamo did use one. These are generally worn under heavy costumes so that the performer doesn't overheat in the latex suit. Basically they pump cold water through a series of hoses. This is usually done in between takes just to cool him off. He'll sit in his chair and they just turn it on for a few minutes because if you overuse the cool suit it can make the actor sick from the sudden hot-cold, hot-cold changes wrought on his body temperature.

Tweaking Spawn's suit with CGI capabilities fell to Steven "Spaz" Williams, the animation director for SPAWN. Dippé also journeyed to ILM to help supervise the complicated visuals. He communicated with Williams daily and many things were done remotely via phone and video lines, but Dippé also went up to the Marin County facility every couple of weeks to work more directly on certain aspects himself. Williams dealt with the complicated special effects on the film full time on a daily basis, and this aspect of the film took months to complete.

Although principal photography wrapped in November 1996, the final special effects shot wouldn't be completed until June, when the film was finally due to be finished and ready for its August opening.

During post-production, every aspect of this film was constantly vying for Dippé's

constant attention and input. "I had a conference call with ILM this morning about some animation and we had a meeting with the music people today," said the director about the demanding post-production chores. "We're picking musical groups to make proposals to. We're going for a post-Heavy industrial electronic metal sound. It's going to be, in general, a heavier, darker sound. I think the people who like Spawn are going to like the sound. The composer's name, and one of the soundtrack supervisors, is Graham Ravelle. He was the composer for THE CROW. He's done a lot of films but he's a very talented guy. I'm working with him on putting together the style of the sound in the film in general. We've had a list for months of groups that I like and that people think are good for the picture and we just pared it down today to the ones that we're going to go after. It's going to be the kind of music that's right for SPAWN. It's going to be more of the alternative, industrial and also some of the new electronic sounds. We all went over the film last night, the sound people, myself and [editor] Michael Knue, and I definitely want to integrate songs, sound effects and score together. So we've been talking about how that's all going to go in and out. I believe that we're going to have a very strong soundtrack album, but I don't want songs to overwhelm the scenes. The song is simply there



John Leguizamo as Clown, Spawn's recruiter from Hell, a demanding Jim Carrey-like role in full prosthetic makeup by the KNB Efx Group.

the SPAWN comic book via a friend. When the project was announced it was his agent who suggested that the part of Clown could be right up his alley. "The take was really dark and Clown was the best part in the movie," said Leguizamo. "I just needed to fix it up a little bit to make it a little funnier and a little sicker, and add just a little more gusto."

"I worked with KNB and we did a couple of screen tests until it was cool. The first one looked just like the comic book but it was too thick on my face and I thought at this point you could get anybody to play this because you don't even know it's me. So we toned it down and there was more movement and it was closer to my face, but I still looked like the comic book. It was just so I could put a little bit of me into it."

It took several costume tests before the right look was arrived at. "They built a big, fat rubber suit and then they stuffed it and put breasts on it like a heavy man has, a corpulent fella, a big guy, and then they put a fold in the back and they had to test it because I was going to do somersaults and stuff. I wanted to make it really physical—forget that! I did one and I fell flat on my back. No, I think I'll just crawl around..."

"I had to walk crouched

down on my haunches. I had the tightest buttocks—not that you want to know this and I don't know why I'm telling you—I could bend titanium. I had to be like that for hours. I remember in one scene with Martin [Sheen] my legs started trembling and I was about to collapse. I'm shaking and trying to say my lines.

"Because I was crouched down I was very limited, but what's fascinating is that the costume ends up helping you create the character because the limitations that it gave me also created the walk—the behavior. But I was still able to grab and pull and yank and trip people."

Working in the Clown costume was a continuing series of discomforts for the actor. "I lost maybe five pounds. It was tough, man. Even though they developed this thing called a cool suit, where they flow ice through it—it wasn't enough. My head was sweatin'! It was like a mini-sauna on my head. And then you can't remove it, you can't open it. All you can do is just sweat! I had blisters on my chin, blisters underneath my eyes. Nasty."

Because of the difficulties of working in the suit, when scenes were filmed in which performers were reacting to Clown off screen, a stand-in did

JOHN LEGUIZAMO

"This is the closest to a comic book that any movie has gotten. BATMAN—I love Tim Burton, but it's too weak. It's not dark enough, and it's not violent enough."

the voice for the actor to loop in later. "Usually you stay and help out other actors, but when you're doing this prosthetic stuff you can't take too much. You have a very low tolerance for anything. The first day I was ready to rip that stuff off my face and go insane! I was ready to speak in tongues! The day they wrapped that movie was the happiest day of my life."

The unusual nature of Clown is that he's able to transform into Violator, a 12-foot monstrosity, which meant blue screen work. But he also had to act like someone who is transforming into a monster at the appropriate times. "For the transition part," Leguizamo explained, "[Director] Mark Dippe' had the idea that I was going through incredible pain so I was spasmodically flailing and wailing, and then they'd pull me out and leave the space empty and then Michael Jai White [as Spawn] would act to nothing."

Leguizamo provided the voice for violator in post production. "A lot of looping," he said. "A lot of voice-overs, because there's a lot of effects going on and steam, and that messed up the sound. There's a fair amount of Violator voice that I've got to do. I did very preliminary looping for them to show it to New Line, and then I've got to do the real stuff. It's going to be hard because that voice burns out my vocal chords. I can only do about an hour, if that much, a day, so it's got to be really planned out."

Leguizamo also did blue screen work opposite the CGI character of Malebolgia, the demon who recruited Spawn from Hell. "He's all CGI and he's huge, and so they basically lifted me and rigged me and I had to act to this imaginary spot on the wall. I did a lot of that. That's in the middle part of the story where Malebolgia's pissed

at me because I haven't gotten Spawn to be on our side."

This isn't the first special effects film Leguizamo has worked in, though, as he also had a featured role in SUPER MARIO BROTHERS. "That had a lot of blue screen, too," he said, "but not as much as in this one."

What Leguizamo has seen of SPAWN impressed him. "It looks good! I liked the script, but it's going to be so weird and twisted it's either going to be amazing or it's going to suck. It's so trippy. It really makes you feel a lot because Spawn's a burn victim! He's discovering himself and finding his humanity. And he has this great love for a woman, and sold his soul to the Devil. His wife married his best friend and there's the kid that he never had. This is the closest to a comic book that any movie has gotten, in my opinion. BATMAN—I love Tim Burton, but it's too weak. It's not dark enough and it's not violent enough." And not as wild as SPAWN. □

Clown as depicted in the best-selling Todd McFarlane comic book, done-in by Spawn.



to support the film.”

Dippé worked from the start with the idea in mind that SPAWN would be a PG-13 film. In SPAWN, the younger set is represented by ten-year-old Miko John Hughes, who plays Zack, a homeless boy who befriends the barely human hero. Hughes has appeared in a number of films, beginning with his film debut in PET SEMTARY at age two and a half, where he played the zombie baby who had to bite through Fred Gwynne’s Achilles tendon. “That just grosses me out. That was pretty freaky. It’s weird,” he remarked looking back on the role. But in WES CRAVEN’S NEW NIGHTMARE, instead of being



SPAWN’s brain trust, director Mark Dippé (l) and producer Clint Goldman, both ILM veterans branching out.

the monster, Hughes was menaced by the monster when he was kidnapped by Freddy Krueger. Hughes likes working on fantastic films because of the unusual behind-the-scenes elements.

“Those are my favorite kind,” he said. “I like doing those because you get to see all the cool Violator robots and the Freddy arm. There’s one scene in Freddy where he gets this really long arm and he grabs me and spins me forward. It’s kind of freaky. I love getting to see all that cool equipment.”

And on SPAWN the boy was able to experience a lot of that. As Hughes explained, it was real fun. “The sets are amazing! It’s a lot like the comic book, except a whole lot different.”

Although Hughes didn’t get to be directly menaced by the animatronic Violator other than

SPAWN

THE KNB EFX GROUP

Kurtzman, Nicotero and Berger, makeup mavens.

By James Van Hise

The KNB Efx Group was the creator of SPAWN’s makeup effects. Headed by Rob Kurtzman, Greg Nicotero and Howard Berger, KNB designed and built body suits for Spawn and Clown, as well as animatronic Violator, matched in CGI by ILM.

“For us SPAWN was a really big film,” said Rob Kurtzman, who runs the company with Greg Nicotero and Howard Berger. “We did a lot in it and there’s a lot of things we had to do to incorporate with the digital effects. This is our biggest show as far as the amount of time, and the prep that we’ve had to do. A lot of the other films in the genre usually have much shorter shooting schedules, six to ten weeks or so. This is 50 days for the shooting schedule. The budget on this is about \$40 million, and they’re packing a lot of vi-

sual effects in.”

KNB has been in business since 1988. The films the company have worked on include FROM DUSK TILL DAWN, ARMY OF DARKNESS, DANCES WITH WOLVES, MISERY, and ERASER. Genre credits include TEXAS CHAINSAW III and the NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET films. They do a little bit of everything, including bigger movies with animal effects, like JUNGLE 2 JUNGLE.

Bob Kurtzman explained how KNB was formed, “The three of us had worked around town at various studios: Rick Baker’s, Kevin Yaeger’s, and Stan Winston’s on different shows. We started to work together on EVIL DEAD 2. We’d been friends, but that was the first show where we all were on the same set together. After that we decided to form our own company and basically started a

A KNB technician applies finishing touches to the full-scale model of Violator.



Michael Jai White as KNB’s Spawn.

small shop. Since then we’ve grown. It was 1986 and about two years later we formed the company, but we were still freelancing for a couple years after that.”

Kurtzman, Nicotero and Berger have a basic core unit of people who work for them regularly on projects. “It changes but some of our core guys have been with us for the last seven years or so. There’s about seven or eight guys who are with us all the time, and then we have freelancers that come and go depending on the size of the show.”

In the case of SPAWN the requirements of the film were so great that their crew expanded to 50 people to handle the demands. KNB built three versions of Violator. Noted Kurtzman, “There’s a rod puppet, which is hung by wires and used for wide shots where we get the whole body. The big one has a motion base on it which has to be taken out digitally. We have the wire one for quick shots that we don’t need to put the big one in for. Then there’s the insert head which has full facial movement and a horn that comes out like a stinger. And finally there’s the full hydraulic Violator, which is the big one, and it pretty much does everything—full upper body movement, arms and facial movement.

“The big hydraulic Violator was a huge undertaking. Things that big are really difficult to operate and get smooth move-



Supervisor Greg Nicotero adjusts Spawn's prosthetics on set.

ments with. It took a long time to figure all that out. It's basically like the T-Rex [in JURASSIC PARK]. It's the same technology. The T-Rex was on a motion base, except the only difference is that I think this one was a little harder because we actually had arms that we had to articulate rather than two little hands in front of it. T-Rex is mainly the jaw and head, and the body on the thing. But this one has to have arm movement and be able to reach in and grab things."

It took several months to construct all of the practical Violators so that they would be ready and able to fully function on set. "It's all hydraulic," Kurtzman revealed. "It's all welded frame with hydraulic tubes in it, and it has a control box which is where all the circuit boards are. Basically everything from that goes out to the controllers, the hydraulic potentiometers, so they relay the controller movement to the 'brain' of the creature and then translates that to the movements of the joints on all the arms, etc."

All of the mechanical Violators were built to be able to interact with a live performer, but the twelve foot version does most of the work and is capable of the most movement. "The other ones are just made for specifics, like its head in the shot growling at [Spawn] or we also have insert feet that walk in the frame that are all

cable-operated, and insert hands that are cable-operated that can reach in and grab. We sometimes use the insert hands with the close-up head if we're not seeing the whole body because the close-up head doesn't have arms."

Among the many other props and devices KNB built for SPAWN is the blade arm used by Cogliostro in which a sword shoots out of his arm. As Bob Kurtzman explained, "There's a version that he clicks with his wrist and it shoots out. It's on a track. It's aluminum. We just cut it out and buffed it down. Spawn also has some big blades that pop out of his arm. There's four of them sticking out and they make a fist that's like four or five inches in front. The actual effect of them coming out of his arm is a digital effect and then we have a prop arm that he pulls on—it's a glove with the blades mounted underneath.

Bottom: KNB technicians operate the Malebolgia rod puppet for blue screen filming. Right: A KNB artist sculpts Malebolgia during pre-production.



ROB KURTZMAN

"Violator is basically like the T-Rex in JURASSIC PARK. It's the same technology. Except that this one was harder because we had arms that reach and grab."

We've done the aftermath parts and then the actual forming of the blades are digital."

But just as extravagant and important in SPAWN is the look of the title character, which involves various pieces of special makeup, from the burn makeup of the resurrected Al Simmons to the versions of the Spawn costume, including the final one with its glowing eyes. But once the time consuming process of designing and constructing the Spawn suits was accomplished, KNB managed to get the time it takes to dress up Michael Jai White down to an hour, which is extraordinarily fast for such an elaborate costume.

"Clown takes a lot longer. Clown takes two-and-a-half hours to put him through makeup and then about 15 minutes through suit. We try to get it fast for the actor, for us, and for the production. Didn't want to come in at three in the morning to do makeups. He has a big fat suit that we built for him and his appliance makeups and his gloves."

KNB also set up some of their mechanical Violator puppets for blue-screen shots which were later incorporated with the CGI. As Kurtzman described it, "Eventually they end up going to Hell and all of the blue screen shots are for when they're in

Hell and there's fire erupting in the background in the actual matte shot of Hell. All that's being shot with blue screen. Originally a lot of that was going to take place on the sound stage, but now they're going to just have them sucked down into Hell and do the battle in Hell. It's just easier to deal with. Then they just have to deal with compositing everything instead of trying to set up the action on set because the Violator's so big. They even raised the ceiling on the set just to get it in. There's a big horn on the top of Violator's head which is mechanical and it shoots out like a stinger, and it's trying to get Spawn and he's moving his head out of the way and it's piercing the walls

"We're also doing a minia-



ture," Kurtzman added. "It's a puppet that goes against a blue screen of the big demon/devil in Hell. Then there's CG of all the dominions of Hell behind him. It's kind of like the Violator but it's a little different. It has a pot belly and it's a big evil demon thing with a big jaw. We decided to do that in miniature just because it's all basically happening in Hell so it can be shot against blue screen and the size reference doesn't really matter." □

SPAWN

ANIME NOIR ON HBO

McFarlane brings anime edge to TV's SPAWN.

By Patrick Legare

Before New Line's SPAWN hits the big screens this summer in vivid live action, HBO will be launching the character as an adult-oriented animated series with stories written by Alan McElroy and based on Todd McFarlane's comic books. This series marks the debut of the newly created HBO Animation, a division that will be "spawning" original animated shows for HBO and other broadcast and cable networks. The show's first season premiered May 15 and consists of six episodes. It will be followed by another animated effort called "Spicy City."

The HBO series showcases Spawn as creator Todd McFarlane intended, a superhero with an attitude.

While the film will be aiming for a hard PG-13 rating, the cable series will have few limitations and, according to McFarlane, will actually be geared towards an older audience more in tune with HBO's Saturday "Round Midnight" time slot.

"It had to have a flavor," explains McFarlane, that would appeal to "basically an over-16 audience of male viewers....So it's like an action movie."

The series features an evocative combination of Tarantinoesque black humor with ultraviolent confrontations and the occasional spicy sex scene. Bullets pierce bodies, an arm is torn from its socket, blood splashes across the screen in slow-motion, a man burns alive in Hitchcockian fashion similar to the leaking gas-pump scene in THE BIRDS (1963).

Later, Spawn's hell-sent guardian, The Clown, leers at Spawn's handiwork, a shredded, bloodied corpse, and comments, "Check his shorts—I bet they're brimming over!" Even Spawn gets into the act as an anti-hero with such Clint Eastwood lines as "Back Off! Before I personally introduce your face to your colon." This is the animated BATMAN with cojones.

The show's heavy attitude is what keeps executive producer McFarlane's dark, deadly character on the razor's edge and the primary reason for its stunning rise to the top of the comic book chain. In a year that is brimming with comics being turned into animated and big-screen heroes, SPAWN sets itself apart.

Veteran actor Keith David



TODD MCFARLANE'S SPAWN debuted on HBO May 15, an adult-oriented, grim, hard-hitting adaption written by Alan McElroy that's not for kids.

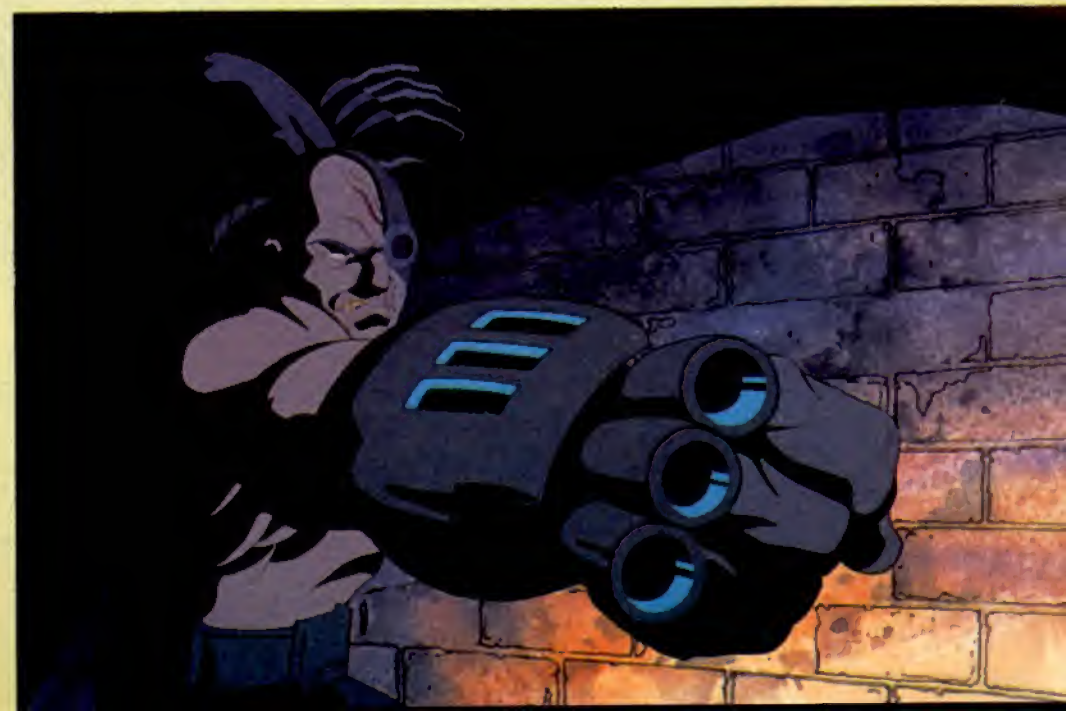
(CLOCKERS, DEAD PRESIDENTS) voiced Spawn while Michael Nickelosi did the devils demon Clown and Richard Dysart (L.A. LAW) performs as Cogliostro. James Keane (DICK TRACY), Michael McShane (BROTHERLY LOVE) and Ronny Cox (DELIVERANCE, ROBOCOP) also provides voice work. HBO Animation profits from a wealth of animation experience including Catherine Winder, former producer of LIQUID TV's AEON FLUX who was named Vice President, and Eric Radomski, the division's supervising director, who is also producer and director of the animated BATMAN series.

"I think we can add more mood to it," McFarlane said of the first season's results. "I

think we can add more atmosphere. I know we can fucking make those backgrounds a hundred times better. Some of the actual drawing, we've reconfigured the shadow work so it's not so round, it's got edges to it. I think we can refine what's there...so it's not like the second season is going to be a dramatic jump, it's just going to be that all those elements that make it cool are going to be a little more polished.

"It was kind of odd that I insisted that [HBO] put me in charge," he continued. "I knew nothing really about animation. I asked the questions and learned along the way. On the creative side of it and looking at storyboards, we all kind of went over it, and got to the point of

Overtkill attacks: McFarlane acts as executive producer and oversees the production for HBO, part of his mission to perfect the franchise.



TODD MCFARLANE

“Spawn will never be a household name. It’s just too odd, too edgy, because it’s never going to be endorsed by everybody. We’ll have half-a-household name.”

trying to put out something that had an edge. I’m not going to say it’s any better or any worse than anything anybody’s seen...we were just trying to push people to do something a little bit darker and grittier.”

Perfecting SPAWN is McFarlane’s mission. He maintains the character will always remain as much a child of his as his two daughters, and he refuses to let it become what’s viewed as a sell-out, like BATMAN.

“Batman has always been a cool concept to me,” McFarlane admitted, then added reflectively “What if Batman wasn’t owned by corporate America and didn’t worry about whether or not it was O.K. to put him on pajamas? Then I think he’d act a little more like Spawn acts.”

McFarlane goes on to describe Batman’s ongoing battles with the Joker, who commits all kinds of atrocities, gets captured by Batman, escapes and kills again. “It becomes a little bit of that vigilante mentality that we all have when we watch those cool movies like RAMBO. We want justice to be served and if the system won’t serve it, then Batman, God damn it, why don’t you pull out a gun, you pussy, and why don’t you plug that guy in the forehead!”

You might say McFarlane occasionally lives in his cartoon world, but his edgier SPAWN opens a range of new doors for American animation. However, the violence-and-sex quotient seen in the HBO series have sparked a sensitivity issue that the creator fears could have long-range effects on his other ventures.

McFarlane sees the series as having the “potential for controversy for the wrong reasons.” He concludes that the gap will be bridged between the animated series made strictly for adults and his toy company that

sells its products to an age group not quite ready for the show. “People are not going to do their homework,” he says resignedly. “People are going to have knee-jerk reactions.” Including boycotting of his other products?

“Potentially, one of my other companies has got products that have Spawn on them. Then people don’t want to sell it because five moms decided to band together and got their 500 friends to write letters, and all of a sudden people are saying, “No, I don’t want to carry this.”

Still, the series is a groundbreaker to the mainstream American audience. The show’s “edge” bears strong resemblance to the Japanese anime films that are rife with adult themes and violence. Anime’s popularity has reached cult status in America, but McFarlane’s SPAWN would be the first all-American anime product.

“The Japanese have been doing for it for a hundred years,” laughed McFarlane. “Nobody ever brought it over here.” So he decided to be the first.

What McFarlane went after was to incorporate the sensibilities and styles of anime into SPAWN by giving the show

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Clown bedevils Spawn’s existence, in a version edgier than the feature film.



Todd McFarlane watches his comic book creation come to life as Michael Jai White demonstrates his fire power as Spawn.

reacting to its off-stage presence, he wanted to be. “It’d be cool! I want to be able to fight him. I get to throw a rock at him. I get to sock Clown on the head, and then that makes him mad and he morphs into the Violator.” Judging by Hughes’ enthusiastic response to acting in SPAWN, his age group just might be the film’s targeted audience.

But Dippé didn’t see aiming the film at a PG-13 audience as a limitation on depicting SPAWN’s comic book action. “The book itself has a lot of very graphic violence, and those images are images we still have, but the way in which I deal with it in the film is different than in the book,” he said. “The theme is still the same. It’s still very macabre. The theme itself is still a very complex and dark one, but the world is a complex place in which the good people don’t always win; it’s very cruel. And Spawn, Al Simmons, is a complicated man. When he’s murdered, his soul does not go to Heaven. It goes to Hell—maybe not the deepest level of Hell, but it goes down. He makes a deal with a devil (not *the* Devil) and his soul is reconstituted back on Earth as a Hell creature. Killing bad guys doesn’t help anything. Not killing bad guys doesn’t help anything. It’s still a macabre, dark situation but in the story our hero, Spawn, rises above it and redeems himself in the sense that he does make a very important

choice and fights off the devil who has tricked him and is trying to get his soul.”

Once the principal photography was completed, comic book creator Todd McFarlane stepped back into the picture to see how the film was coming together. Regarding the first rough cut he saw of the assembled footage, McFarlane observed, “It’s always tough when you’re close to it. I’m a perfectionist so I think you can always do better. On the animated series we get the animation in its raw form, edit it and ten days later it turns into something completely different. I’m still waiting for that magic spark where I go—this is not just good, there’s something a little bit special there. To me that’s not so much in the special effects as it will be over all, in the presentation and the attitude of the film. I’m hoping that we don’t lose the attitude, and if we can keep that and instill that into the audience then those we’re trying to hit will feel that we didn’t compromise.”

While McFarlane admitted that he was impressed when he saw the life-size, 12-foot version of the Violator, he wants to see the film deliver more thrills than just having a terrific monster. “I have always liked monsters and I have a bias in that I think the average boy does like monsters. That’s the easy stuff, like getting a dog to bark and then getting the rest of the neighborhood to do it.” □

CASPER

A SPIRITED BEGINNING™

Sean McNamara directs CGI ghosts and a mad bomber in a tale of Casper's origins.

By Dan Scapperotti

The Friendly Ghost is making a reappearance in his second feature film, this time as a direct-to-video release. When Universal Studios failed to plan their own sequel to CASPER, Harvey Entertainment, who owns the rights to the character, wanted to maintain the franchise and decided to shop Casper around. They found a home at the video division of 20th Century-Fox. Universal also plans to go forward with a sequel for theatrical release, tentatively set for 1999. The new video prequel hits the street September 29.

Heading the production is director Sean McNamara, who produced, wrote and directed THE SECRET WORLD OF ALEX MAC, the highest rated show on Nickelodeon. A graduate of the film school at Loyola Marymount University, McNamara worked on his first film, HOLLYWOOD CHAOS, in 1989. This summer McNamara has a trio of features scheduled to be released. Besides CASPER, McNamara has also directed Trimark's GALGAMETH and THREE NINJAS for Columbia.

The director had just put THREE NINJAS in the can when he learned that producer Mike Elliott was preparing CASPER, A SPIRITED BEGINNING. He showed Elliott the rough cut of THREE NINJAS and a month later he was in



Casper befriends Brendan Barrett as Chris in an origin story that explains why the Friendly Ghost doesn't scare people.

production. Casting was already in progress and pre-production had been completed by the time McNamara came on board.

The script by Jymn Magon, who wrote Disney's A GOOFY MOVIE and worked on such shows as DUCK TALES and WINNIE THE POOH, delves into CASPER's origins and therefore would predate the action in the original 1945 *Casper* cartoon, THE FRIENDLY GHOST. Originally planned as a one shot, the jovial specter got a new lease on life when Famous Studios' president Sam Buchwald decided to bring Casper back two and a half years later in "There's Good Boos Tonight." But, it wasn't until 1950 that the character received his own series.

CASPER, A NEW BEGIN-

NING opens when Casper finds himself in his new ghostly form. He's aboard the Ghost Train headed for Ghost Central Station to be indoctrinated into the spirit world and shown how to be a ghost when he gets sidetracked and thrown off the train. The new spirit finds himself in a small town called Deedstown where he meets the Ghostly Trio, three decidedly mean spirited specters.

"He doesn't know he's a ghost," said writer Jymn Magon. "He doesn't know who he is or how he got there. The Ghostly Trio begin to train him, but, as you know, they're mean. Casper doesn't know he's supposed to be a bad ghost and that he's supposed to scare people. He just wants to be friendly. He meets a

little boy, Chris [Brendan Barrett], who is disenfranchised and they become friends. Very much like the cartoon."

The boy's father, played by Steve Guttenberg, is a contractor who feels the town is dying and needs an injection of new blood in the form of a mini-mall. To make way for the new shopping center he's getting ready to demolish the old Applegate mansion. The local landmark preservationists oppose the project and, to complicate matters, the Ghostly Trio have taken up residence in the old house. Whenever the construction crews show up they're met by a barrage of ghostly pranks that drive them away.

The spooks look the same as they did in the previous film and the voices for Casper and his three spirit pals, Stretch, Fatso and Stinky, are supplied by the same actors from the first feature. But some new spectral characters have been added. The big, frightening head of the ghost training is named Kabosh. "We have James Earl Jones as the voice of Kabosh," said director Sean McNamara proudly. "He's great. It's like Darth Vader on the show. The voices were done before the film. They recorded all their lines and variations of the lines and then the sound editor came in and edited them all together."

Kabosh has a sniveling little assistant named, appropriately, Snivel, voiced by Pauly Shore.



Stretch (above) and Fatso (right), ghosts from the first film who return in the prequel to teach Casper how to haunt, CGI by OCS/Freeze Frame.

The cast also includes Laurie Loughlin, who's on *FULL HOUSE*. She plays Chris's teacher, who is opposed to the construction project. Several actors also make cameo appearances. Richard Mull, Zelda Rubinstein, Edy McClure, Debi Mazar, and Rodney Dangerfield, who plays the mayor.

When the contractor, in desperation, hires a munitions expert to blow up the house he gets more than he bargained for. "A character that I came up with that tickled my imagination," said Magon, "and everyone else seems to like, is this crazed munitions guy who goes by the name Bill Case. I play him like a textbook Yahoo. A fellow who just wants to blow things up. He gets rid of gophers with a stick of dynamite. Unfortunately, Steve Guttenberg's character has no one else to turn to and finds himself saddled with this guy who is a maniac, a real kook. He carries explosives with him and lights them in the office. Finally when they try to get him to stand down and abort the mission, he won't. He's got his marching orders and is going to blow that place up. I really enjoyed writing for that character because he was so over the top."

Case's mania for dynamite eventually leads to a life-threatening situation in which Casper must save Chris's life. Playing

the demolition demon is Michael McKean, Lenny Kosnowski on *LAVERNE AND SHIRLEY*.

"There's a company called OCS Freeze Frame which is animating the ghosts," said McNamara. "Basically we would shoot the scene first with cardboard cut-outs of the ghosts so the actors could get used to where the ghosts would be and we could see where they would be. Then we'd do it again without the ghosts there. We'd have to do it a couple of times to make sure that everybody's eye lines were right. Then we'd put the thing together and go back and OCS starts laying in the ghosts where we put the cardboard cut-outs. Pretty much the way they did the origi-

Sean McNamara directs Rodney Dangerfield in the direct-to-video prequel, developed by rights-owner Harvey when Universal delayed making a sequel.



"I tried to create a Spielbergian world by shooting at Universal," Sean McNamara admitted. "I wanted to create that world that's a little too real, a little too harsh."

nal CASPER."

McNamara is no stranger to CGI effects. His *SECRET WORLD OF ALEX MAC* heavily uses computer generated effects and his direct-to-video feature for Trimark, *GALGAMETH*, a Medieval tale filmed in Romania, features a creature that grows from six inches to 80 feet tall, a totally CGI character.

Interestingly enough, the production returned to Univer-

It's a little too real, a little too harsh. That was one of the magical things about it. It will feel like a Spielberg film when you watch it.

"We went to Warner Brothers for the town of Deedstown. We used the town square where we found Chris's house, a place Casper comes to live for a little bit. The interior we found in this gorgeous old house down in South Central L.A. We pretty much shot everything in those locations."

On a visit to the set, writer Jymn Magon found himself immersed in a comic book world. "I was watching them shoot CASPER over at Warner Brothers. Two blocks away they were shooting the new *BATMAN* movie and two blocks in the other direction was Metropolis from *LOIS AND CLARK*. Wow!"

Even the director showed his amusement when discussing one ghostly intervention scene. "The three uncles Fatso, Stinky and Stretch, wreak havoc on people who are protesting outside the house," said McNamara. "They possess them, they fly around them, they sneeze on them and all of that. We have hundreds of extras running like crazy as the ghosts basically attack them and play jokes on them. It took us three or four days to shoot it. It's pretty spectacular. That was shot in front of the Harvey House.

"That one had to be thought out the most. There were stunts involved, we're smashing cars, we're dealing with hundreds of people, having to know where the ghosts are at all times flying around. That was the hardest scene to shoot because it was the biggest, the most spectacular. Every scene that involved a ghost takes a lot of planning. Everything had to be meticulously storyboarded so we were all on the same wavelength as far as how the ghosts were go-

ing to appear. Then we'd have to rehearse it and shoot it.

"Another tricky thing is when you're working with actors who are reacting to something that's not there are the eye lines. You have to be careful that it will look realistic in the final print."

One of the problems facing McNamara on this film is one that can plague any production—especially one with a 30-day shooting schedule: Kids. "I deal a lot with kids," said the director. "Shooting kids before summer is always a timing problem because they're only allowed on the set a certain amount of time. When your star is a kid, you get them for five-and-a-half hours and then they have to be in school. It's hard to work around that. You just have to shoot scenes with kids in the morning and adults in the afternoon or vice versa. You have to schedule it, light it and have it all ready to go, then walk the kids out on the set and shoot them. When I work with kids I usually shoot them in summer because they're allowed to be



Steve Guttenberg, Barrett, and school/teacher Lori Laughlin, facing the menace of urban sprawl.

on the set for two more hours a day. They have to have break time, but at least they don't have to have school time. In CASPER, I had five kids in major roles; the lead little boy, the three bullies and a little girl bully."

While Casper was a lukewarm cartoon character in theatres, he was a success on television. So, it seems appropriate that he has come full circle, returning to the small screen where he was most successful. □

CASPER™

DIGITAL EFFECTS

OCS, the new CGI kid on the block, went after CASPER and won the project.

By Dan Scapperotti

A CASPER feature, by its very nature demands a huge amount of special effects. ILM had delivered the effects for the 1995 Spielberg-produced film, but the DTV budget of the sequel prohibited the use of that mega-effects studio. Instead, the job went to a new kid on the effects block, OCS/FreezeFrame/Pixel Magic, a full service digital film facility based in Toluca Lake, California. Heading the project was vice president Raymond McIntyre Jr.

OCS got its feet wet when it jumped into the effects pond for HOME ALONE II. It seems that airlines are a bit touchy about showing in-flight movies that prominently display the names of rival carriers. Airline video releases are routinely revamped to rid them of offending scenes and language which may offend passengers as well as rival logos that may offend airline executives. HOME ALONE II was awash in American Airlines planes and terminals. In stepped McIntyre and his staff.

"Using our computers we took the words American Airlines off wherever you saw it," said McIntyre. "On walls, on jacket patches, ticket counters. On the plane we removed the name as well as the tell-tale red and blue strip and just made it two blue strips, to become a nondescript airline. On airline-specific releases that happens all the time. All of the other airlines wouldn't display a movie that is advertising for another



OCS/Freeze Frame/Pixel Magic supervisor Raymond McIntyre Jr. matching ILM's CGI work on the original for a fraction of the cost.

airline."

The effects house has also worked on BATMAN FOREVER, ERASER, BROKEN ARROW as well as INDEPENDENCE DAY. OCS created the high-speed Grand Canyon sequence where Will Smith flies his F-18 while pursued by an alien craft.

McIntyre's company wasn't even considered for CASPER when the bidding process began. "I heard that a direct-to-video sequel was being made," he said, "So I found out who the producer was and we took it upon ourselves to make tests. We modeled Casper from watching the movie, the one ILM did for Universal. We composited him into a scene we just happened to have. We are not known for 3D character animation. This was our biggest project. What we did for the test was have Casper fly into a room, come up to the screen and say 'Hi, I'm Casper.' We even digitized the voice here at our facility. We called them up and we showed them the tests."

The producers were impressed and gave the effects house some additional suggestions. Together with his lead artist, Ken Wilder, McIntyre spent five days working on their suggestions. "We took it back to them and they were very impressed," he said. "We won the project."

CASPER, A NEW BEGINNING called for a total of 350 effects shots and 35 minutes of 3D character animation. "We're doing everything, not only the 3D character animation," McIntyre said. "So all the

compositing, wire removals, all the stuff that needs to be done, we are doing here."

Along with Casper himself, the Ghostly Trio makes a return engagement along with some new spectral faces, including Kabosh, the main ghost trainer. "In total we're doing ten ghosts with lines and animation and then we have some generic ghosts that are just background," said McIntyre. "We also designed the ghost train."

The producers originally envisioned Ghost Central Station, where Kabosh trains new ghosts like Casper, as a practical set, but McIntyre showed them some tests of a complete CGI set and they loved it. The use of a fully CGI environment for Ghost Central Station allowed OCS 100% control of the camera, pulling out any limits on what they could shoot.

"So we built Ghost Central Station ourselves," McIntyre said proudly. "It's 100% our design and the same with the train. We created that, too. It has a train engine, two passen-



Kabosh, a new ghost character in the prequel is voiced by James Earl Jones, in charge of ghost training, putting Fatso through his paces.

“I found out who the producer was,” Raymond McIntyre Jr. said. “We modeled Casper from the movie ILM did and made a composite test of him into a scene we had.”

ger cars and a caboose. We did them as real structures. On Ghost Central Station you can see the bricks. It’s not a cartoon, but it’s not 100% real either, because this is a place where only ghosts go. It’s very ghostly. There’s fog around and everything kind of glows. It has a look all to itself, but it’s based on a real building, with glass windows and walls and all that kind of stuff. It was a collaboration between myself, Ken Wilder and Jim Gorman. They were responsible for actually creating it in the computer. The design was a collaboration.”

Since **CASPER, A NEW BEGINNING** was so effects-laden, McIntyre, as the effects

supervisor on the film, had to be on set when they shot everything, including principal photography.

For the 3D work McIntyre is using the Lightwave 3D Version 5.0 software by Newtech Inc. “We are primarily running that on Windows NT platforms on the DEC Alpha hardware,” said McIntyre. “We also have some Pentium-based Windows NT machines. For compositing and wire removals we use the Cineon Digital Film System. The Detailer allows us to paint texture maps right on to 3D objects such as the Ghost Train and Ghost Central Station.”

One of the set pieces for **CASPER, A SPIRITED BEGINNING** is a protest rally

staged in front of Applegate mansion, where Casper takes up residence with the Ghostly Trio. The ghosts show up amid all the protesters and start scaring everyone away. They drive a bulldozer and crash into a car and create all kinds of havoc. “For those scenes we prepared a bunch of [effects],” said McIntyre. “Sometimes the ghosts are visible, sometimes they’re invisible. When they’re invisible there are a lot of wire removal gags in there.”

The climax finds Chris, the young boy befriended by Casper, trapped in the house with a bomb about to go off. It becomes a race against time to save him. “Suddenly, the effort is to save him and not destroy the house,” said McIntyre. “Casper swallows the bomb in an effort to save the house from blowing up. He contains the blast inside himself which only a ghost can do. Kabosh who, throughout the movie, is after both Casper and the Ghostly Trio, because Casper never got processed and the Trio got processed but don’t follow his rules, finally catches up with them. When Casper swallows the bomb he comes up with this extremely scary face as a result and all this smoke and stuff spewing out of him, he scares Kabosh so thoroughly that he realizes that Casper is well-trained in being a ghost, and the Trio has trained him, so he doesn’t go after them anymore.”

On set, cardboard cutouts that were approximately the size of the ghosts were used in rehearsals. “This gave the actors an idea where their eye lines should be,” said McIntyre. “We would rehearse the actors with the pieces and we would go through the entire scene so they would know what they were doing and how the movement would occur and things like that. Then we would actu-

ally shoot it on film once like that and then instantly remove the cardboard cutouts and the actors would repeat the performance as best they could with no cardboard cutout in the scene. That way they’d be working around the area left for us to put the ghosts in, in post. We had eye line references to where we wanted them to look.”



The ghost train transports Casper at the beginning (above), CGI by OCS. Kabosh haunts Applegate Mansion.



Wires, green rods and prop personnel dressed in full green suits against green screen were all used to make the invisible antics of the ghosts possible. “If we needed a bowl of fruit to fly across the room,” said McIntyre, “someone in this full green suit would carry the bowl as if the ghosts were doing that. Then we will remove the green screen actor and there will be the plate all by itself.” □

Casper pops out of Chris’s backpack, CGI by OCS, who won the assignment by doing their own ghost test shot and showing it to the producers.



THE TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSACRE IV

McConaughey and Zellweger as stars get indie film into theaters.

By Jay Stevenson

When THE RETURN OF THE TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSACRE screened at the American Film Market in February 1995, one observer (who admittedly was there to plug his own competing product) proclaimed that the film could not possibly receive a theatrical release. Despite this proclamation, the film was picked up in July of that year by Cinepix Film Properties, one of Canada's leading specialized distributors, which was in the process of moving into the American market with films like THE YOUNG POISONER'S HANDBOOK and Roberto Benigni's excellent IL MOSTRO/THE MONSTER (not a horror film but a comedy about a poor fool mistaken by the police for a serial killer). The fourth install-

ment in the CHAINSAW saga next appeared as a blip in *Daily Variety's* box office coverage, the industry trade paper noting that a small regional release had failed to place the film among the paper's listing of Top 60 earners for the week. After that (and a title change to THE TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSACRE IV), the film seemed destined for video oblivion, but then fortune smiled in a most unexpected way.

Among the film's cast of unknowns were two up-and-coming newcomers, who advanced down amazingly similar career progressions. Each went on, separately, to appear in both a respected art house effort and a major Hollywood blockbuster: top-billed Rene Zellweger co-starred in THE WHOLE WIDE WORLD and JERRY MAGUIRE; Matthew McConaughey

played a supporting role in John Sayles' well-received LONE STAR and also leapt to box office stardom as the lead in A TIME TO KILL. Now, with McConaughey co-starring in July's high profile science-fiction pic, CONTACT, the time was ripe to exploit the subsequent fame of the two stars who had begun their film career in a little flick made in Texas.

"Distributors would rather not take the risk that they were once forced to," acknowledged the film's writer-director, Kim Henkel. "It's a tough struggle, which I realized after I completed the film and was trying to find a suitable distributor for its theatrical release."

Henkel, who co-wrote THE TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSACRE with director Tobe Hooper, had been effectively separated

Left: Following in the footsteps of its own successors in the slasher genre (e.g. PROM NIGHT), the new film serves up a group of teens on graduation night as victims. Below: Kim Henkel, who co-wrote the original TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSACRE, returns to the series as writer-director.



Leatherface, the franchise's marquee character, returns to the screen, this time played by actor Robert Jacks.





The third sequel (originally titled RETURN OF THE TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSACRE) repeats many motifs and images from its progenitor. In this familiar scene, the hapless heroine escapes from the crazed chainsaw family by crashing through a rooftop window and jumping to the ground below.

from the first two sequels, although he does receive a credit on LEATHERFACE: THE TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSACRE III. "What happened on II and III was awful, so when there was an opportunity to get back involved, I really wanted to do this," said Henkel, who resecured the rights from New Line Cinema after being displeased with their treatment of him on LEATHERFACE.

Of his limited involvement with that film, Henkel claimed New Line was simply meeting its contractual obligation. "What happened was they met the letter of the agreement about the script," he explained. "After they did the picture, there were certain aspects of that agreement they wanted to renegotiate, and we just simply refused. I think they were a bit offended by our refusal to play ball with them. In a certain amount of time they were obliged to do something further to retain their rights, or lose them, and they just let it lapse."

With rights to the franchise back in his hands, and without studio interference, Henkel wanted to return to the independent spirit of the first film. "When we did the original, Tobe and I were just a couple of kids. We didn't have the inhibition you have when you work in the Hollywood system; we didn't have the kind of things that go on that tend to homogenize things, so we had a very personal investment in it, and it was something that we did ourselves."

Believing that the first two sequels had not advanced the series, Henkel went back to the formula of the original, rather than making a true sequel that continued the story. What Henkel thought he could bring to freshen up the fourth installment was mostly a matter of characterization, especially in terms of emphasizing the "relationships of

the chainsaw family. Even the victims are—though this could not be called a probing character study, you quickly get to know and have a sense of them, not only as clichés of teenagers but something a little bit beyond that, so that we have feeling for all of them."

Henkel admits that his approach amounts to almost being a structural remake of the first film, with a new cast of characters. The question was how to tailor such a film for a new audience, which had already been conditioned to expect certain elements because of their familiarity with the first film. Especially difficult was

“Distributors would rather not take the risk they were once forced to. It’s a tough struggle, which I realized after I completed the film.”

—Writer-director Kim Henkel—

matching the shock impact of the original, whose raw power and visceral impact was like nothing audiences had seen before. Today, however, over two decades of slasher films have conditioned fans to the point that it's more difficult to catch them by surprise. How can CHAINSAW IV possibly impact them in a way to match the original?

"With a picture that's a sequel, it's a problem. The way I approached the problem was that I felt like what had followed really did not understand what made the first one work or what was effective about it. I think there was a focus on a certain aspect of it, but it was not particularly effective to me. There was a core of what made the first one work, and I tried to take that a little bit further. It's not a kind of quantum leap that you took when you saw the original, but I think it's very difficult to make that kind of leap with a sequel. If I were going to attempt that, I would have to do a different sort of film than what I have done, one that was more like a true sequel. It may take a pretty large leap. I think that this film will be to many people just what they would want and expect, but at the same time be utterly unexpected." □

The presence of Rene Zellweger, who later co-starred in the box office smash JERRY MAGUIRE, helped give CHAINSAW IV the star value needed to earn a theatrical release in these direct-to-video days.



A welcome return to the medium's cartoon roots

HERCULES

A Buena Vista release of a Walt Disney picture. 92 mins. 6/97. Produced by Alice Dewey, John Musker & Ron Clements. Director, John Musker, Ron Clements. Music and score, Alan Menken. Lyrics, David Zippel. Production designer, Gerald Scarfe. Art director, Andy Gaskill. Story animation supervisor, Barry Johnson. Screenplay by Clements, Musker, Bob Shaw, Donald McEnery, Irene Meechi.

Hercules.....	Tate Donovan
Young Hercules.....	Josh Keaton
Young Hercules (singing).....	Roger Bari
Phil.....	Danny DeVito
Hades.....	James Woods
Meg.....	Susan Egan
Pain.....	Bobcat Goldthwait
Panic.....	Matt Frewer
Zeus.....	Rip Torn
Hera.....	Samantha Eggar
Alemene.....	Barbara Barrie
Amphitryon.....	Hal Holbrook
Hermes.....	Paul Shaffer
The Fates.....	Amanda Plummer
Narrator.....	Carole Shelley, Paddi Edwards
Narrator.....	Charlton Heston

by Mike Lyons

As *HERCULES* opens, Charlton Heston's voice booms over the soundtrack, expounding on ancient Greece, until he's interrupted by the Muses. This Greek chorus, in the guise of a Motown girls' group, tells Heston they'll take over narration duties, to which the actor replies, "You go girl!" At this

point, *HERCULES* yanks the rug out from under audience expectations and for the next ninety minutes takes them on a wonderfully frenetic ride that is, quite possibly, the funniest film ever from Walt Disney Feature Animation.

This no surprise, given that *HERCULES*' directors, John Musker and Ron Clements, also helmed 1993's *ALADDIN*. This time, however, the filmmakers have outdone themselves. From the skewed look derived from artist Gerald Scarfe (which seems right at home in Greek mythology) to the barrage of one-liners, puns, and pop-culture references, *HERCULES* is constantly nudging its audience in the ribs, pushing them to have a good time.

To its credit, the film manages some quieter moments, too, as well as a tremendous amount of character development. Though hysterically caricatured, Herc's satyr trainer (perfectly voiced by DeVito) is given a vulnerable, washed-up side, ingeniously ani-



In a light-hearted touch typical of the approach Disney took to *HERCULES*, the mythic muscleman gives his loyal flying horse Pegasus a high-five.

mated by Eric Goldberg. Equally stunning is the headstrong heroine Meg, as Susan Egan's sexy voice is paired with Ken Duncan's sly, sultry animation. Then there is the scene-stealing Hades, Lord of the Underworld. With James Woods' hilarious delivery (he refers to Zeus as "Mr. 'Hey you, get off of my cloud!'"), animator Nick Ranieri has fashioned what could almost be an animated version of a *GOODFELLAS* cast member—sinewy smooth one minute, a ball of fire the next. Wrapping all this together is a

change-of-pace, infectious Gospel score by Alan Menken and David Zippel.

Despite a disappointing final confrontation between Hades and Mount Olympus (it seems left open for one of Disney's made-for-video sequels) *HERCULES* ropes us in and pulls us along gleefully. Just as the subtle realism of *POCAHONTAS* and the somber tone of *HUNCHBACK* served as great expansions to the world of animation, *HERCULES* serves as a welcome return to the medium's cartoon roots. □

The Dark Knight fades out

BATMAN AND ROBIN

A Warner Bros. release. 6/97. 130 mins. Produced by Peter Macgregor-Scott. Executive producers, Benjamin Melniker, Michael E. Uslan. Director, Joel Schumacher. Camera, Stephen Goldblatt. Editor, Dennis Virkler. Production designer, Barbara Ling. Art direction, Geoff Hubbard. Visual effects, John Dykstra. Music, Elliot Goldenthal. Screenplay by Akiva Goldsman, based on Batman characters created by Bob Kane and published by DC Comics.

Mr. Freeze/Dr. Victor Fries.....	Arnold Schwarzenegger
Batman/Bruce Wayne.....	George Clooney
Robin/Dick Grayson.....	Chris O'Donnell
Poison Ivy/Dr. Pamela Isley.....	Uma Thurman
Batgirl/Barbara Wilson.....	Alicia Silverstone
Alfred Pennyworth.....	Michael Gough
Commissioner Gordon.....	Pat Hingle
Dr. Jason Woods.....	John Glover
Julie Madison.....	Elle Macpherson

by Steve Biodrowski

This is the kind of movie that elicits critical mantras about "great visuals" and "weak script." But, truth be told, the visuals are terrible. For all the flash and clutter, very little is actually happening, and what little we do see is highly repetitive—of previous *BATMAN* films and of this film itself. Some good images do arise during the confusion (Mr Freeze's miniature ice sculpture of his catatonic bride), but director Joel Schumacher isn't smart enough to recognize and emphasize them, so

they flit by in the blink of an eye, while the camera lingers on less interesting shots instead.

The story by Akiva Goldsman is the jumbled mess we've come to expect. As in *BATMAN FOREVER*, we get one villain too many—in this case, Poison Ivy (Thurman), who never interacts with Freeze in an interesting way. The characters

have too little in common (besides being villains) for them ever to form a partnership—Ivy wants plants to dominate the world, but Freeze's modus operandi would destroy flora as well as fauna. While the film takes half its running time to bring these two together, the story desperately piles on other elements without develop-

ing any of them: Alfred is seriously ill; his niece shows up and eventually becomes Batgirl, to no great effect; and Batman and Robin argue about the terms of their partnership. None of it amounts to anything, but it does pad the running time past two hours.

Clooney can't do much with the role, which has been robbed of the psychology that made the character interesting. O'Donnell's youthful gung-ho is one-note, and Silverstone barely registers in her bat-costume. Series regulars Michael Gough and Pat Hingle do what they can. Thurman's vamping is, surprisingly, unsexy (she is hardly helped by her ridiculously unsexy costumes). Only Schwarzenegger comes across well. Working under some impressive makeup, he captures the flare necessary to bring comic book villainy to the screen, even as he manages to show a hint of the humanity hiding beneath the cold veneer. If only the film had focused on him and a more dramatic conflict with Batman, then this might not have been the worst film in the series. □

Batman (Clooney) and Robin (O'Donnell) are joined by Batgirl (Silverstone) in the latest adventure of the caped crusaders—another overcrowded, confused affair.



BORDERLAND

By Anthony P. Montesano

BUDDY, ROUGH MAGIC

Two Hollywood legends cross into the borderland.

Two modern Hollywood legends recently lent their names to Borderland projects. Francis Ford Coppola executive produced **BUDDY**, and **ROUGH MAGIC** was produced "in association with" Martin Scorsese. For Oscar-winner Coppola, who last directed the misguided **JACK**, **BUDDY** is actually a step up, but what was the director of **RAGING BULL** and **TAXI DRIVER** thinking?

The derivative **BUDDY** (Columbia, 6/97; 84 mins; PG) is a well-intentioned and occasionally enjoyable film which unsuccessfully attempts to weave the novelty of **MIGHTY JOE YOUNG** (1949) with the sentiment of **E.T.** (1982) and the hijinks of **BEDTIME FOR BONZO** (1951). Based on the true story, "Animals Are My Hobby" by Gertrude Davies Lintz, **BUDDY** is told with the golden glow of a fanciful bedtime story. Once upon a time, a seemingly childless and well-to-do couple living in 1940s upstate New York turned their palatial estate into a habitat for a menagerie of animals. Lintz (Rene Russo), who narrates the proceedings with nostalgic longing, unabashedly defends her whimsical fantasy to be queen of the jungle and live among the animals. One day, when she hears of a pneumonia-stricken infant gorilla at a Philadelphia zoo, she takes it upon herself to raise the animal as she would a human child, naming it Budda (Buddy for short). He quickly becomes her favorite (much to the mischief and jealousy of the resident chimps).

Lintz sees humanity in the gorilla, and she is not alone. "His eyes are not those of an animal," says a priest who visits Buddy backstage at the World's Fair. But alas, Buddy eventually strikes out from his wild side, and Lintz realizes that while he may have the capacity to love, Buddy is simply not domestically controllable. The film (which was marketed as a family film but contains scenes that may scare very young children) was produced by Coppola's American Zoetrope along with Jim Henson Pictures and sports Oscar-worthy make-up effects from Jim Henson's Creature Shop.

ROUGH MAGIC (Goldwyn, 4/97; 104 mins; PG-13) doesn't know what it wants to be and, as a result, ends up being not much



Rene Russo stars in Henson Pictures' fanciful take on a true story, **BUDDY**.

of anything. Falsely advertised as a film noir, this effort—which was directed by Bernardo Bertolucci's wife, Clare Peploe—has so many problems it's difficult to know how to start listing them. Filtered through the offbeat sensibilities of a David Lynch, the film might have approached the quirky edginess for which it seems to be striving. But as is—with recently turned witch Bridget Fonda turning a Mexican would-be-rapist into a sausage, which is swallowed by a dog who later dies but is brought back to life by a magic elixir, only to talk like the would-be rapist, until he is pulled from the dog's stomach and restored to human form, only to begin dancing in the middle of a botched wedding taking place beneath a neon facsimile of an atom in a Uranium museum owned by the jilted, murderous groom who ends up falling in love with his male valet—the film is simply a mess. Along the way, Fonda lays a blue egg which hatches a tarantula; makes loves while floating above the bed; spits out her heart in a toilet only to watch it turn into a playing card; strikes a man dead by command; and witnesses the murder of her mentor magician friend who later turns into doves and returns as a taxi driver.

A short sequence, in which Fonda travels by boat to a remote region of Mexico and initiates herself with local witches who infuse

her with magical power, actually works quite well. Had the rest of the film maintained the quality of those scenes, **ROUGH MAGIC** might have been watchable. As it is, the film is for rabid Bridget Fonda fans and lovers of boring campy schlock only.

In the playfully macabre spirit of Alfred Hitchcock's 1955 **THE TROUBLE WITH HARRY**, **8 HEADS IN A DUFFEL BAG** (Orion, 4/97, PG-13) is a dark comedy preoccupied with dead body parts. Gangster Joe Pesci is handed the task of delivering a bag with the heads of eight slain mobsters to the Cappo who ordered the hit. Not unexpectedly, this bag is mixed up at the airport. You get the idea. Three-quarters of the way through, the film pays an unintentional one-minute campy tribute to **NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD**. Pesci's dreams are haunted by the decapitated bodies of the victims, which crash through the walls to attack him in his bed. This momentary horror is offset by the bodiless heads, which come alive on the table and harmonize an cappella version of "Mr. Sandman."

With **AUSTIN POWERS: INTERNATIONAL MAN OF MYSTERY** (New Line, 5/97; 89 mins; PG-13), actor-writer Mike Myers (**WAYNE'S WORLD**) has created a perceptive and funny parody of James Bond and **THE AVENGERS** that also sends up '60s bubblegum movie-making. As both the unlikely sex-symbol-mas-

ter spy and his arch nemesis Dr. Evil, Myers also pays homage to **DR. STRANGELOVE, OR HOW I LEARNED TO STOP WORRYING AND LOVE THE BOMB**. In fact, **AUSTIN POWERS** is a bag full of small pleasures, inside jokes, and pop trinkets: action is routinely interrupted by snippets of psychedelic musical dance numbers; the James Bond characters of Pussy Galore and Odd Job are replaced with Alotta Fagina and Random Task; the film revels in visual sexual references while poetically avoiding nudity—all while Powers utters phrases like "shag-a-delic baby." Burt Bacharach (Powers' favorite singer) shows up as himself singing atop a double decker bus in Las Vegas. Powers back flips into his British flag-painted convertible. And Fembots—female robots who shoot from the breasts—succumb to the inexplicable charm of Powers stripping to the song "I Touch Myself." Other action scenes play out to the '60s camp classics "Secret Agent Man" and "These Boots are Made for Walkin'."

Sound like a mess? On paper, maybe. But Myers pulls it off. The plot, such as it is, starts in 1967, when Dr. Evil cryogenically freezes himself and launches into orbit in a Bob's Big Boy for 30 years. Powers is also frozen. When Dr. Evil returns in 1997, Powers is thawed out to hunt him down. But the film is not concerned with plot; it's focused on individual, at times disjointed, moments. What happens, for example, if the camera doesn't cut away when the villain begins his evil laugh? When Powers and his partner Vanessa Kensington (the alluring Elizabeth Hurley) are finally captured by Dr. Evil, why doesn't he shoot them (as his son suggests) rather than slowly lower them into a pool of mutant sea bass? How can an evil villain take over the world if his henchmen don't keep him up to date on "frickin'" world developments like the divorce of Prince Charles? Will the hopelessly antiquated Dr. Evil ever reconcile with his '90s-style son, while attending a father-son support group moderated by Carrie Fisher? And what ever happened to Gary Coleman and Vanilla Ice anyway? **AUSTIN POWERS** delights in these and many other absurd moments. □

FILM RATINGS

- Must see
- Excellent
- Good
- Mediocre
- Fodder for MST-3K

FACE OFF

Director: John Woo. Writers: Mike Werb & Michael Michael Colleary. Paramount, 6/97, R. With: John Travolta, Nicolas Cage, Joan Allen, Gina Gershon, C.C.H. Pounder, Margaret Cho.

Hollywood finally let John Woo make a John Woo film. This is both a good and a bad thing. The force of his talent is truly amazing to watch when allowed free rein, but the excess does eventually reach absurd levels. Thus, his previous two American films were something of a trade-off—not as exciting as his Hong Kong work, but not as silly, either. Although both *HARD TARGET* and *BROKEN ARROW* showed signs of the talent that gave us *HARD BOILED* and *THE KILLER*, they were relatively restrained and depersonalized efforts that bore less resemblance to his hard-hitting Hong Kong flicks than did the work of some of his imitators (*DESPERADO*, *ASSASSINS*). Now, Woo comes out with both barrels blasting: all the stylistic excess is there, and the script even echoes the themes of his earlier work.

The plot revolves around a typical Woo conceit—the identification of the hunter with the hunted—but in this case, it is pushed to fantastic extremes. Travolta begins by playing Sean Casey, an FBI agent obsessed with tracking down terrorist Castor Troy, initially played by Cage. In a series of plot contrivances, Troy is left in a coma (after a brilliantly staged action set-piece), and Casey must undergo a radical surgical process to give him Troy's face, so he can dupe Troy's brother Pollux (Alessandro Nivola) into revealing the location of a bomb. Predictably, Troy emerges from his coma, forces the surgical team to give him Casey's face, and (now played by Travolta) takes his place. The real Casey (now played by Cage) must escape prison and put a stop to his alter ego.

Typical for Woo, the sheer force of the imagery is supposed to carry viewers past plot absurdities (e.g., using blood type rather than fingerprints to reveal the true identities), while at the same time, the director wants the audience to buy into the emotional lives of his obsessed and haunted characters. To a large extent, he achieves this (with fine help from Cage and Travolta in the gimmicky roles), but he is also undone by his unfortunate video game mentality: all the extras and stunt men serve as sacrificial pawns in the chess game between the two leads (unlike *DIRTY HARRY*, you know who the winner is in a Woo movie because he kills his opponent, not because he saves innocent lives). Ultimately, the film reaches some kind of overload, after which it becomes difficult to feel any real suspense. Thus, Woo falls short of the ambition achieved in Michael Mann's masterpiece *HEAT*, which had just as much action but never lost sight of the story's humanity.

●●● Steve Biodrowski



In *FACE OFF*, FBI agent Sean Casey, who is wearing the face of terrorist Castor Troy (Nicolas Cage) for an undercover assignment, is taunted by the sight of his own face (John Travolta), and wedding ring, transplanted onto his enemy.

MEN IN BLACK

Director: Barry Sonnenfeld. Script: Ed Solomon, based on the comic book by Lowell Cunningham. Columbia, 7/97, 98 mins. PG-13. With: Tommy Lee Jones, Will Smith, Linda Fiorentino, Rip Torn.

Although makers of *MEN IN BLACK* deny comparisons to *MARS ATTACKS*, the film itself quickly draws its own parallel during the opening title sequence: in macro-closeup, a whimsically cartoony dragonfly (achieved with CGI) flits down a road, accompanied by an amused Danny Elfman score. And, like Tim Burton's film, *MIB* takes a tongue-in-cheek approach to aliens on Earth. But there the comparison ends. Whereas Burton sympathies were entirely for disenfranchised outsiders, *MIB* is the ultimate insider fantasy, in which the clique group is so exclusive that no one else knows it exists. In this scheme of thinking, common people are just plain too stupid to deal with the truth, so they must be kept in ignorance, while the secret society goes about keeping them safe from alien invaders. And all of this is portrayed as a good thing.

What makes this condescending paternalism palatable is the sly sense of humor, the matter-of-fact deadpan tone treating every outrageous development as just the same old thing. The result, ironically, undermines any sense of reality, capturing a comic book fantasy tone far better than the overreaching but ultimately uninteresting production design of something like *BATMAN AND ROBIN*. Jones is dead-on perfect as the world-weary experienced agent, and Smith is the perfect comic foil as the new guy on the job; Rip Torn is also on target as the gruff boss, and Linda Fiorentino, though given little to do, does it well. Only Vincent D'Onofrio, as the villain, falls short—neither scary nor funny. And the conclusion falters a bit, setting up the sequel. Ultimately, this film isn't quite as screamingly funny as it should be, but it comes damn close.

●●● Steve Biodrowski

ART HOUSE

KILLING GRANDPA

Director: César D'Angiolillo. Writers: D'Angiolillo, Eduardo Mignona, Ariel Sienra. Tara Releasing, 4/97, 114 mins. Not rated. With: Frederico Luppi, Inés Estevez, Laura Novoa.

Sometimes it's magic realism; sometimes it's just tedious. Mexican director César D'Angiolillo appears to be going for the hot-house atmosphere of *LIKE WATER FOR CHOCOLATE* in his tale of how Don Marion (Luppi)'s hunger for life is restored by an enigmatic nurse-cum-bruja (Estevez). But the helmer can barely raise the temperature to lukewarm, much less get a boil going under his predictable and strangely detached scenario. Maybe part of the problem is cultural: one gets the feeling that D'Angiolillo wants us to be scandalized by the May-December romance between the don and nurse Rosita (or at least by the lesbian relationship that the don's granddaughter [Novoa] is apparently having with her motorcycle-riding girlfriend. On our side of the border, however, the immediacy of these dilemmas doesn't quite come across. More critical, D'Angiolillo seems loathe to indulge in the kind of audacious drama and vivid imagery that magic realism needs to truly come alive; the closest he gets is some eleventh-hour symbolism that anyone who's seen *THELMA AND LOUISE* will smell a mile away. Passionless and slow, the only magic *KILLING GRANDPA* can conjure is the ability to lull its audience into a stupor.

● Dan Persons

MADE-FOR-TELEVISION

ROBIN COOK'S INVASION

Director: Armand Mastroianni. Script: Rockne S. O'Bannon, from the novel by Robin Cook. NBC-TV, 4/97, 4 hrs., w/commercials. With: Luke Perry, Kim Cattrall, Rebecca Gayheart, Christopher Orr.

This is another alien invasion story, without many fresh twists. The basic concept is that a virus comes to Earth, needing human hosts to replicate. Peo-

ple with Rh positive blood slowly turn into alien beings, while those with Rh negative quickly die. Beau Stark (Perry) is the first to be infected (a la *THE BLOB*) and becomes a Pied Piper who leads his infected followers to welcome the approaching invaders. His girl friend Cassie (Cattrall) avoids infection and leads six other rebels to seek a cure for the rapidly spreading viral infection. They finally use the internet to seek help and track down Doc McCoy (Michael Warren), who has found a way to slow the rate of infection.

The characters are not well developed, and the story seems old hat. The most novel concept is forsaking the cliché that the alien hive mind will lack emotion: Stark continues to love Cassie even after he is thoroughly transformed into an unsightly being whose outer skins falls off. But Cronenberg's *THE FLY* this is not. Scriptwriter Rockne S. O'Bannon once seemed a promising sf talent, creating a clever story about languages as a virus for the revived *TWILIGHT ZONE* series, but since then he has launched *SEAQUEST DSV* and now this piece of pabulum. Whither originality?

● Dennis Fischer

THE ODYSSEY

Director: Andrei Konchalovsky. Script: Chris Solimine & Konchalovsky, from the epic poem by Homer. NBC-TV, 5/97, 4 hrs., w/commercials. With: Armand Assante, Greta Scacchi, Isabella Rossellini, Eric Roberts, Alan Stenson.

Director Konchalovsky, under exec producers Francis Ford Coppola, Nicholas Meyer, and Fred Fuchs, has created a stunningly photographed, tightly plotted, and finely directed piece that makes use of its extended format, rather than padding out the time like NBC's *ASTEROID*. The story follows Odysseus (Assante) from his glory at Troy where he utters an insult to the gods; this causes Poseidon to send him and his crew on a 20-year journey to battle the elements, deadly creatures, and magical spells in a desperate attempt to get back home.

Every penny of the \$35 million budget is on the small screen, making this a true epic—unlike so many other TV "epics," with cheesy effects and an overall cheapness in appearance. Konchalovsky, for all the cash and technology at his disposal, knows how to tell a story, and realizes when less is more, such as his vision of Odysseus' disastrous flight through a cavern housing a man-eating creature. Another director might have emphasized the monster, to less dramatic effect, but Konchalovsky focuses on the men, showing the creature in quick glimpses and letting the sailor's screams and blood carry the scene, thus making a truly frightening sequence.

The cast is uniformly excellent: Assante cuts a fine figure as the classic hero; Scacchi, Roberts, Rossellini, and newcomer Alan Stenson breathe life into Homer's timeless characters. This fantasy adventure should show all the *HERCULES* and *XENA* wannabes how it's done.

●●● Frederick C. Szabin

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TWENTY THOUSAND LEAGUES UNDER THE SEA

Director: Rod Hardy. Script: Brian Nelson, based on the novel by Jules Verne. ABC-TV, 5/97. 4 hrs, w/ commercials. With: Michael Caine, Patrick Dempsey, Bryan Brown, Mia Sara, Adewale Akinnoye-Agbaje.

The story may suffer from public knowledge, the mere passage of time, and the accumulation of current technology, but this mini-series of Verne's classic novel spices up the narrative by taking some brave chances and mounting a handsome production that gives the Disney version a run for its money.

There's no way one can believe Dempsey as a French professor, but once the problematic nationality is

Handsome production design by Stuart Burnside gives the Disney version a definite run for its money.



overlooked, his turn as Aronnax helps Caine carry the film—not that Caine needs help. His Nemo is full of anger, passion, and contempt for people of the land, so much so that one begins to wonder why he suffers Brown's sabotaging Ned Land as long as he does—a mistake that eventually brings his downfall. The production is full of excellent undersea footage, real and manufactured, and makes wonderful use of CGI in creating Nemo's underwater domain and its inhabitants.

What saves this production from being just another rehash of a well-worn story is Nelson's script and Hardy's stylish direction. This version goes where not even Verne felt it necessary to go—to the surface, where it portrays Aronnax's bitter father and follows the actions of the proud captain of the *Abraham Lincoln*, a ship that floundered at Nemo's hands. Nelson and Hardy use Verne's novel as a solid springboard to flesh out not only the main characters, but even some of Nemo's crew, who have always been portrayed as silent, obedient drones; here, they are thinking, breathing, feeling men caught up in the adventure as much as Nemo.

Thanks to some intelligent choices, this mix of main and supporting drama pays off with excitement, suspense, and ultimately tragedy. The subtraction of some characters and the addition of others (Mia Sara as Nemo's daughter and Akinnoye-Agbaje as a former slave) do not mar Verne's intention but expand it. This carefully-crafted adaptation may never achieve the classic status of the Disney film, but it is a

pretty good attempt to stand in that shadow. ●●● 1/2 Frederick C. Szebin

HBO's SPAWN

continued from page 51

"the feel, the look and the ambiance of it." While much of their work is already sent overseas for completion (to Ko-Ko Entertainment and Sheen Production), the team will actually be doing the production work there, beginning with the second season.

His struggles with the animated series have certainly paid off as the show does justice to the comic book. But McFarlane also deals with the rigors of big-screen film life, where the MPAA rating could become a key factor, especially in such a dark and violent story. The decision has been made to accommodate for a PG-13 rating. Despite what would seem a stronger movie without any rating constraints, McFarlane is confident fans of all types will be satisfied.

"I don't think anyone that watches the animation is going to be disappointed, nor do I think that anyone who doesn't know anything about Spawn is going to be too alarmed by it. I think the movie is the place that's going to tie it all together. You don't have to go cute and you don't have to go R," though he happily added that the film will be skirting "two inches

from R."

The summer of 1997 looms as a significant step in the direction of McFarlane's goal for his comic book creation: to make Spawn a household name. Batman... Superman... Spidey... Spawn? McFarlane knows this could be his greatest summer ever if the film and series are successful. However, he does not sound too worried if they are not.

"You pull me back here in September and then we'll see whether it actually worked or not!" He modestly joked. "It might have actually fizzled. When Spawn was created, the goal was to make him a household name. That he had a successful movie or a successful show—is that kind-of cool from a distance? Yeah, I guess, but if it means getting him to be a household name then that's what we have to do. The answer is that it will *never* be a household name. I see it now; it's just too odd, too edgy because it's never going to be endorsed by everybody in the household. We'll have half-a-household name. So half the people will get it and the other half will never get it, but they're probably the same people who don't get THE THREE STOOGES either!"

Additional reporting by Karl Williams

LETTERS

LIFE AFTER "MEN IN BLACK"

You might be interested in knowing that Albert K. Bender, mentioned prominently in the sidebar "MIB: The Urban Legend," has a subsequent film and genre connection: in 1965 he founded the Max Steiner Music Society, the first organization devoted to a film music composer and film music in general. In the '60s, Bender moved to Los Angeles where he befriended Mr. Steiner in his waning years and through the aegis of his widow made available to members of the organization tapes of his scores from his collection of check discs made at the time of the original recordings. A section from one of these tapes was used to fill a hole in the soundtrack in the 1992 restoration of KING KONG.

Rick Mitchell
Film Editor/Film Director/Film
Historian/Historical Technical
Advisor to *American
Cinematographer and Films In
Review*

WHO'S POWERFUL?

Thank you for your "50 Most Powerful People in Science Fiction" article [28:12:32] but I was shocked that you chose the makers of INDEPENDENCE DAY over STAR WARS creator George Lucas. Why?

What you have basically done is promoted special effects over storytelling. STAR WARS is worshiped for the originality of its story and characters. ID4 is somewhat respected for its special effects. After the phenomenal success of the STAR WARS reissue, how in the world can Lucas be *under* anyone, let alone (writer/director) Roland Emmerich and (writer/producer) Dean Devlin? At this especially prime time for Mr. Lucas, now prepping the new STAR WARS movie, you instead focus on Emmerich and Devlin who are filming a new... "Godzilla" movie(?)...

Did it ever occur to anyone that twenty years from now, no one will care enough about INDEPENDENCE DAY to give it a "special edition" re-release? The STAR WARS fanfare 20 years later should automatically put Lucas at the top!

Maybe you should recall the issue to save yourself further embarrassment, and in the meantime I will look forward to your next is-

sue. Hopefully, it will make me forget about this major oversight.

Tony J. Severino
Haddonfield, NJ

[We stand by our rankings.]

This letter is in response to the article that appeared in 28:12, about the 50 most powerful people in science-fiction, horror and fantasy. I would like to point out that you misspelled J. Michael Straczynski's name. It is correctly spelled "Straczynski" [not "Stracyznsky"].

And why have you dropped his ranking from 35 to 42? BABYLON 5 is stronger than ever; it is the best conceived, written and acted science-fiction series on television today (and perhaps of all time).

Ralph Tedeschi
West Warwick, RI

[We stand by our rankings—our proofreading is another matter.]

"LOST WORLD'S" STATE OF THE ART

Over the weekend I went to two different theatres showing THE LOST WORLD: JURASSIC PARK. Did I like it? It's hard to say; I haven't seen it yet. In this age of technical achievements in movies one goal not yet attained is a uniform, enforceable standard for projection brightness. Both showings—in a major mall multiplex—caused eye strain trying to make out anything. Even in outdoor daylight shots, there might be a bright sky in the background, but people and objects in the foreground were dim, almost in silhouette. I've seen well-projected movies, and I can tell the difference.

There are three problems when this happens. First, if you have to get out of your seat to complain, your evening's already ruined, which is why many people don't. Second, theatre management either will not think there is anything wrong or, if they know something, won't admit it. They might give you a free pass, but that doesn't address the basic issue. Third, most of us don't have the technical knowledge about bulb strength, screen size and distance, lumens, foot candles, or whatever to talk intelligently about it. All we can say is, "It looks too dark."

Where is the solution? Smaller theatres could be one answer, though unlikely for blockbuster

openings. Another might be consumer education: full disclosure of technical data posted for each theatre, stating what is recommended vs. what they are actually using.

The only acceptable standard should be: every showing of every movie at maximum capability.

Les Leist
Alexandria, VA

[Perhaps all films should have a toll-free number posted on the end credits, like THX currently uses to check sound quality on their films. That way, gross incompetence could be singled out. Be an activist—complain, demand a refund. It won't save your ruined evening, but it might for the rest of us!]

TARZAN'S GORILLA

The photo of Tarzan and his trusted gorilla companion [29:1:48] was misidentified as being played by Don McCleod. The gorilla in the pilot, as pictured, was played by Kevin Brennan in a suit crafted by his company M.A.X. (Makeup and Animatronic Effects). McCleod plays Bolgani in the series in a suit crafted by John Buechler's MMI. Both companies (and gorillas) are based in North Hollywood.

On the TARZAN front, after our issue went to press, TARZAN lead Joe Lara was fired, and production of the series put on hiatus for a year.

Stay tuned.

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CHARLES POGUE

continued from page 21

what originally spoke to Raffaella on it. That's what spoke to all the people at Universal when they were calling it a masterpiece. That's what got them hooked on it. They knew they had an original, interesting piece."

Pogue said that after filming was completed he received a complimentary letter from Kevin Sorbo praising the script. The screenwriter thanked the actor and explained why he was never a presence on the set during production.

"It's really a shame that all this pettiness had to get in the way of a great project," said Pogue. "I would have done anything for Raffaella except the two things she asked me to do, which were to compromise my integrity and compromise my writing, and it's a shame because it's the first time she ever had first class material since she's been on her own, away from her father. The two best scripts I ever wrote are DRAGONHEART and KULL and it's seven years out of my life by the time KULL comes out.

"They used to make adventure movies for adults and that's what I wanted. I wanted KULL to be an adventure movie for adults that kids could come to. That's what I wanted for DRAGONHEART, which is a swashbuckler for adults but it got turned into a kids' movie because everybody's after the big hundred million dollar movie. The fear is, have they turned KULL into just your basic generic pabulum? I don't know. I wanted KULL by way of SPARTACUS; I hope to Hell we haven't gotten KULL by way of RED SONYA." □

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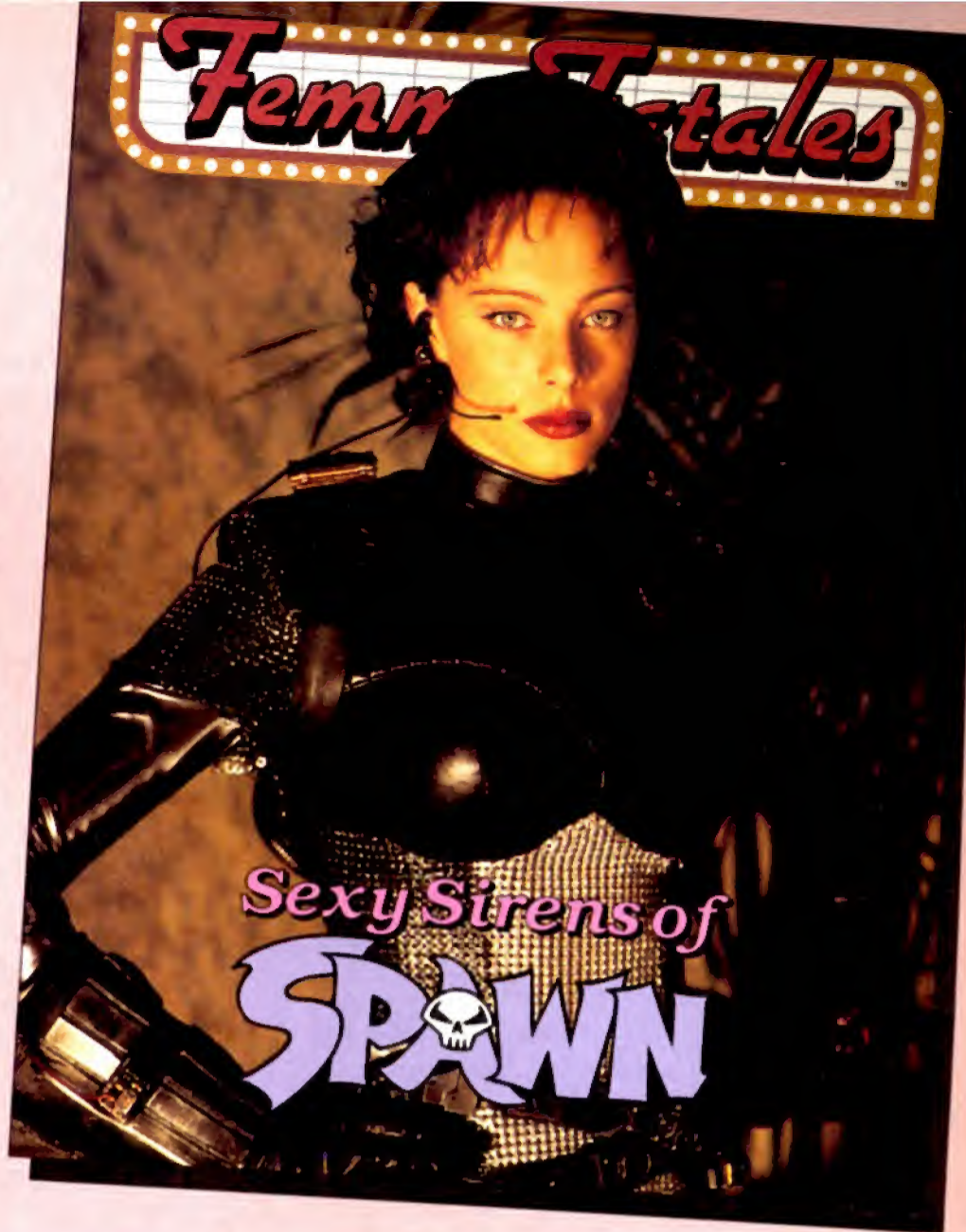
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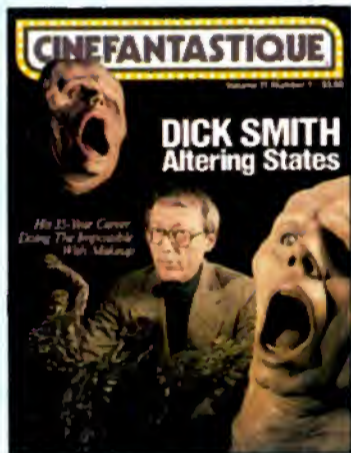
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